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ARIEL DANCES

GREEN DOORS

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DEDICATED TO
MY FATHER

GREEN DOORS





Chapter One

"HELLO! WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?"

Doctor Lewis Pryne was obviously surprised at the intrusion of a mere friend on office hours. "How did you persuade Miss Frazier to bring you in? You aren't — or are you — looking for a doctor?"

Dick Wilder's smile was tinged with awed diffidence.

"No, I'm not wanting treatment myself," he said. "All the same, I did get a regulation appointment from your secretary via the telephone, and I've been out there in your reception office meekly waiting my turn for hours. But first I have a message for you, from Cynthia. They want you for the week-end in Meadowbrook. Harry's counting on golf with you, and the children —"

Lewis broke in dryly. "Sorry, Dick, but I'm most frightfully busy just now. If you insist on staying to chat, I'll send you a bill — regulation fee for a first appointment. But if you vanish at once, I'll let you off. Give my fondest love to Cynthia, tell her I'll call her up; thanks, good-by."

But though the doctor rose, his visitor sat. "You're

hard, Lewis, hard," he murmured. "But it's all right with me. I expect a bill. I'm here to offer you a lovely new patient on a silver platter. It is rather — ah — private, though."

His embarrassment was due plainly to the presence of the secretary, Miss Frazier. She had escorted him into the presence of the famous psychiatrist and she was now hovering near the door on tiptoes, it seemed, to escort him out again.

Lewis sighed, but with good nature. "Miss Frazier needn't bother you," he explained. "She is my confidential secretary and it saves time having her here to make a record as we go along. How many people are out there, Miss Frazier?"

"Only two, Doctor. Mrs. Dickerman and —"

"A sullen but gorgeous fellow who doesn't want to be spoken to," Dick finished for her. "Or is he one of the really unhinged ones and not responsible for his manners?"

Lewis smiled — fleetly — at his secretary. He said to Dick, "That will be Mr. Neil McCloud. He is perfectly sane. He's lost the power of speech, that's all."

"Really? Somehow it didn't look all to me. He has a flash in his eye, — well — a flash —. But I thought the dumb were deaf, Lewis. That fellow heard every word I said — listened as if he heard — and then coolly turned his shoulder. He might have wriggled his eyebrows or something, to show he couldn't speak. I only asked him were you likely to keep us waiting much

longer — assuming, do you see, that he was a regular patient and knew the ropes. What was there in that to antagonize any one?"

Lewis' smile a moment ago had been very fleeting. Now his face had taken on its accustomed gravity. It was an unusual sort of gravity, however, lacking any element of heaviness. "That encounter will have been harder on McCloud than on you, Dick," he said. "He isn't deaf. Merely can't articulate. Hasn't been able to for some months. It's a rather perplexing case of shock. Temporary, I'm certain, but awkward for him while it lasts. It's after four, I think, Miss Frazier. Did McCloud or Mrs. Dickerman have appointments?"

"No, Doctor. Neither of them. Mrs. Dickerman telephoned yesterday and there was no time I could give her within a week. She came on the chance you might be able to work her in somewhere. Mr. McCloud dropped in in the same way. I had no idea how long Mr. Wilder's appointment would take, so I rather encouraged them both to wait. Shall I tell them there's no use now? It's quarter to five."

"No. Don't do that. I'll see them. Only let McCloud in ahead of Mrs. Dickerman."

"Shall I? Mrs. Dickerman telephoned yesterday, as I told you! She came in several minutes ahead of Mr. McCloud too."

"Did she? I suppose then you'd better convey to McCloud, somehow, that I won't be long with Mrs. Dickerman. Tell Mrs. Dickerman that I will be free in an-

other few minutes. Do that now, please, and then come back to take this record. Pardon all this, Dick. Have a cigarette?"

From the brief exchange between doctor and secretary, Dick had been able to form a pretty complete mental picture of what was back of it. Mrs. Dickerman must be some slightly neurotic lady of wealth who was falling over herself to pay fabulous fees to Lewis for a little mental coddling, while the rather gorgeous but definitely shabby dark-browed young giant was, of course, a charity case, and in real trouble. But supposing their needs had been equal, Dick suspected his friend still would favor the penniless down-and-outer, for Lewis was slightly snobbish in his mistrust of wealth and position. It was a little perverse in him. Even his own sister, Cynthia, thought so.

Dick frowned to himself. This matter of Lewis' prejudice against paying patients was rather pertinent to himself at the moment on account of the errand which had brought him here. What could Petra Farwell seem to Lewis beyond what Dick himself thought her — a beautiful but dull ingénue whose psychic maladjustments (if that was the term) were the result of too much leisure and spoiling?

Dick took out his cigarette case, waving Lewis' aside, for Lewis, he knew, was as economical when it came to cigarette brands as he was about clothes and office furniture. What a bare room this sanctum was! The reception office had been on the luxurious side, but that

was Cynthia's taste and doing. She had insisted on decorating it, and Dick could not doubt she had drawn on her own purse for most of the accessories. But even as he passed it up, Dick noticed that Lewis' cigarette case holding the Luckies or whatever they were, was rather wonderful. Finest jade. You could see at a glance. Marvelous color. Some grateful woman patient, of course, had forced the gem on Lewis, and probably he did not dream what its value was; if he did, he would sell it, to give to the deserving poor. . . .

Miss Frazier was back and ready with her shorthand pad. Since they were smoking, Dick offered her a cigarette, one of his own Club variety. But she refused it, coldly, her eyes on her pad. Dick did not so much get the idea of having been put in his place as of the secretary having insisted on keeping hers, which was that of an invisible, impersonal automaton — a dictaphone with judgment. Suddenly Dick did not mind talking before her.

"It's a stepmother stepdaughter situation," he explained to Lewis. "The stepmother is my friend. She is a wonderful person. She knows that you and I are related in a way. (The relationship between them consisted in the fact that Lewis' sister, Cynthia, was married to Dick's first cousin, Harry Allen.) And she got the idea that because of the relationship I might have some sort of a pull with you, do you see? But perhaps that's stupid. Perhaps nobody has a pull with you in that sense. I warned her. Is it stupid?"

Lewis smiled, that peculiar fleeting smile of his. But it was for himself this time. He had assumed the position he kept through all these office interviews. His chair was swung half around on its pivot so that he did not directly face the patient, and his eyes, for the most part, were on the knob of the door leading into Miss Frazier's little private office. "Of course you have pull, Dick, all the pull in the world. But I don't see what that has to do with it. When it comes to taking on patients, one does it on the merits of the cases themselves, naturally. Let me hear."

"Well, it's the stepdaughter who is — funny. Clare, who is my friend the stepmother, do you see, is utterly devoted to the girl. In fact, to my mind, she is almost obsessed with the idea that it's up to her to make the girl happy. That's far-fetched, of course. You can't do *that* for any one. But Clare tries desperately. And all she gets for her pains is very nice polite manners and nothing under 'em. It is absurd. You would think so — you *will* think so — when you see Clare. But even if Clare weren't so wonderful as she is, the girl's indifference would still be absurd, for just on the material side she owes Clare everything she's got in the world. She and her father were as poor as poverty until Clare came into their lives, married the father. Now that she is there, their lives are all luxury. — Charm. — Beauty too. But what good does it do? Clare is only getting her heart broken.

"But I ought to tell you," Dick went on quickly, after

a second's pause in which he had suddenly remembered some last admonishments of Clare's, "Clare doesn't mind personal heartbreaks and things like that. That is not why she wants you to psychoanalyze the girl. It is for the girl's own sake and her father's sake. She doesn't want those two to become estranged. And it is bound to happen if things go on the way they are going. The girl must be more responsive to Clare, return *some* of her devotion, or the father is going to begin to feel the antagonism in the air and blame his daughter for it. For, in a choice of loyalties, the man is Clare's. It isn't Clare's fault it's that way, though. From the very beginning she has *worked* to preserve — even to create — a fine relationship between her husband and his daughter. She is big enough, detached enough, to keep herself and her personal disappointments out of the situation and think only of those two. And that's why she sent me here, at dollars a minute, I suppose, to ask you to see the girl and straighten her out. She has an idea that there is some deeply hidden resentment — some mix-up, anyway — in the girl's subconscious mind and that it only needs you to excavate it. She thinks —"

But there Dick faltered. Lewis was smiling and no longer fleetingly. Miss Frazier, noticing Dick look around for it, pushed an ashtray along the desk toward him. He crushed out his cigarette stub in it, looking miserable and a little angry. "I can see what you're thinking, Lewis," he exclaimed. "You think that it is a simple case of stepdaughterish jealousy and that Clare

and I are just too ingenuous for words to have come bothering a top-notch psychiatrist with it. But you happen to be wrong. You don't know the people. Petra's not jealous. Not for a minute. She hasn't enough warmth in her for such a passion, if it comes to that. Really, she's no jollier with her own father than with her stepmother. But Clare doesn't see that. She thinks it's only herself Petra pushes off. And what is there so absurd in her getting the idea that you might help?"

But if Dick had only noticed, his belated mention of the girl's name had effectually changed his friend's expression.

"Is it Petra Farwell you're talking about?" he asked quickly. "Daughter of Lowell Farwell, the novelist?"

Dick hesitated an instant, glancing a little painfully at Miss Frazier's efficient hand with its pen poised — but so far idle — above her pad. But after all, Miss Frazier's presence at this conference was Lewis' responsibility, and one had to trust Lewis.

So he said, "Yes. It's the Farwells. I thought you would guess. You know I built their house, Green Doors. We started it the minute they were back from the honeymoon. Clare made Featherstone's give me a free hand with it. It was my first real chance at self expression. But Clare had as many ideas as I had and the nice part was that our ideas didn't clash — merely supplemented. Until that summer I had only known Clare socially and even so not very well. She is in an older crowd. It's an interesting crowd. The Lovings, you know, — the

Stracheys, Jim Strange, Isabell Peters Clough. Rather exciting, being accepted by them! Clare sees to it that I am. And Lowell Farwell is the lion of the lot, I suppose. Clare herself ought to be. Wait till you meet her!"

"I have met Mrs. Farwell, once, for a few minutes," Lewis said. "She was Mrs. Tom Otis then. It was just before the former Mrs. Farwell abdicated. But it's Petra, the girl, I'm interested to hear about. Is she prepared to come to a psychiatrist for treatment for — what do you say the trouble is? General lack of appropriate feeling toward the latest Mrs. Novelist's Wife? Or hasn't she been consulted?"

"You keep on laughing at us," Dick complained. "If I were a stranger, would you? Yes, I knew about that meeting with Clare, of course. But I meant, wait till you *really* know her. Clare hasn't said a word about you to Petra, not yet. Petra would be sure to resent it, don't you think? What Clare wants is to have it come about — gradually. If you're week-ending at Cynthia's, right there in Meadowbrook, you can drop around at Green Doors, meet the family, have tea informally in the garden, chat with Petra, — and let that call seem to put the idea of having Petra psychoanalyzed into Clare's head. That way, Petra might get the idea that being psychoanalyzed by Doctor Lewis Pryne would be a pretty interesting experience, do you see? That's Clare's scheme and I think it's a good one."

Lewis, lighting himself another cigarette, murmured, "Good is an adjective that I myself seldom apply to the

word 'scheme.' But it happens that I'll like meeting Lowell Farwell. His psychological novels interest me — at least, to the point of wanting to find out how he gets that way. Even more I shall be glad of an excuse to see Petra again. I met her at the same time I met your Mrs. Clare. By the way, Mrs. Clare is Petra's second or third stepmother, isn't she! Mightn't it be that the child's stand-offish attitude toward the species is cumulative and not, strictly speaking, personal? Had that occurred to either of you? . . . But it doesn't matter. I'm charmed by the invitation to tea at Green Doors. It's only fair, though, that you should warn Mrs. Farwell that it cannot, not possibly, be a professional call. And just remind yourself, will you, Dick, if only now and then, that I'm not a psychoanalyst. It always annoys me a little, being called one."

"Sorry. Yes, I do know, of course. But the differences are too slight for the laity to master. Then you will come for tea? That's fine. All we wanted, as a start-off, really. Clare knows you won't be lionized and I can promise you it will be informal. Shall we say Saturday afternoon? It'll be just the Farwells themselves and me. I'm there such a lot, I'm almost family," he added, flushing a little.

Dick was ready to get out now and give place to Mrs. Dickerman and Mr. McCloud. But he had a diffident feeling that since this was actually a professional seance he had been having with Lewis, it was up to Lewis to bring it to an end. And Lewis had not stirred in his chair.

He was saying, "I'll like seeing your work with that house, too. I've meant to get Cynthia to take me over, ever since you finished it. Why do they call it Green Doors?"

Lewis' gaze, as he spoke, was still attached to the knob on Miss Frazier's door. Dick, now that he had secured part of what Clare wanted and was no longer anxious, was looking at his friend with an increasing discernment in his vision.

"He's got the look of a medieval monk," he told himself,—seeing it, strangely, for the first time. Well, perhaps asceticism was the price Lewis had had to pay for his astonishing success. He had accomplished in ten years or so what usually takes a man in his profession the better part of his life, if he ever achieves it at all. "Naturally Lewis hasn't had much time for the flesh-pots along the way," mused Dick.

Doctor Lewis Pryne was only thirty-three, and yet in the years since graduating from Harvard Medical he had made himself a specialist in psychiatry, written three instantly famous books on dynamic psychology, and accumulated a clientele which might be the envy of any other psychiatrist not congenitally superior to envy, in the country. And he was self-made. At least, ever since his father had died when Lewis was a Senior in Latin High, he had earned his own way, and looked out for Cynthia as well, until she married Dick's cousin, Harry Allen. Yet here he was, in spite of that stupendous early handicap, loaded with fame and honor — and if not with

money, that was simply because money did not seem to be one of his goals.

Meeting Lewis in the ordinary way — that is, outside of an office visit — you got no hint of past struggles and their necessary austerities. His gray eyes were more sleepy than austere, with a languid droop at the outer corners of the heavy upper lids. His mouth curled, slightly, as if fleeting little smiles were habitual, and most of the time an almost palpable light played over the lower part of the face, particularly the full but chiseled lips. Without that light and the odd, fleeting smile, Lewis' mouth would have been definitely sensuous. As it was, you never thought of that — only of its sensitive but exquisitely impersonal sympathy.

The gray sleepy eyes released the door knob, came to rest on Dick Wilder's face. "How did Green Doors come by its name?"

Dick started, realizing that this was a repeated question. What had he been woolgathering about? Lewis, himself. He had been busy seeing Lewis in a new, fresh way, after a fifteen years' friendship. That was strange. Then he understood it. He had been seeing Lewis as Clare would soon be seeing him, — looking at him through Clare's eyes.

"Oh? The name? It was Clare's idea. It's in a poem. Published in *The Glebe*, 1914." (He got up as he answered. Lewis' time *was* precious, and staying to chatter now would be inexcusable, after Lewis had been so alto-

gether patient and friendly.) "I don't remember it all. But there's a line —

'I know an orchard old and rare,
I will not tell you where,
With green doors opening to the sun . . .'

Something like that anyway. Clare said we wouldn't plan a house at all, but just green doors, opening to the sun. We've done it too! You'll see, Saturday. I'll pick you up at the Allens' around four. Crazy to show the place to you!"

During the brief interval between Dick Wilder's departure from the office and Mrs. Dickerman's entrance, Lewis stood in the big window at the back of his desk, looking down onto the glistening river of automobile tops which was Marlboro Street, and recalled his first and only meeting with Petra — the girl who was, so it seemed, the one discordant note in the idyllic existence at that country estate, already famous to literature, — Green Doors, in Meadowbrook.



Chapter Two

LOWELL FARWELL'S VOICE MAKING THE APPOINTMENT over the telephone — it was three or four years ago now — still vibrated through Lewis' memory, melodious, *interesting*. Lewis had never happened to catch sight of the novelist at that time, nor had he since, but he knew from numberless newspaper cuts what he looked like. And the voice perfectly fitted those leonine, distinguished heads.

"My wife has been ill for months and now a friend has persuaded her to see you. Her doctor agrees that it may be a wise move to get your opinion, Doctor Pryne. You are acquainted with him. Doctor MacKay, here in Cambridge. He has come to the end of his resources and is ready to give psychiatry a try."

It was a wind-clear, blue-red-gold October afternoon, when Lewis made that call in Cambridge. The Farwells were living on the upper floor of an unpretentious double house on Fayerweather Street. Instead of the expected maid in cap and apron opening the door, there was a girl in a brown smock. — Strange to be remem-

bering color, and shades of color, after so many months! — Her eyes were brown-gold, and as photographically as Lewis remembered those gay and sincere eyes, he remembered the curves of the smiling mouth.

The room into which she brought Lewis was a blank in memory. Perhaps, even at the time, it had been a blank to his consciousness. Except for the blue gentians. There was a clump of them growing out of dark earth near where he laid down his hat. He supposed the flowers must have been planted in some sort of dish, but his memory of the Farwells' Cambridge living room was fringed blue gentians growing out of dark earth.

The girl's voice was as smiling as her mouth. "Mrs. Farwell will see you in a minute, Doctor."

"Are you Miss Farwell?" he asked, for he knew, from Cynthia, probably, who read the columns of literary gossip in the Sunday papers, that Lowell Farwell had a daughter.

The smile became laughter. Laughter which sounded like pure happiness, translating itself into sound. The rarest sort of laughter in the world. Not amusement. Not embarrassment. Mere self-unknown joy.

"No. I am Teresa Kerr. *This* is Petra."

The novelist's daughter was sitting on the sill of an open window, her background wall-less — a sea of blue October air and light. She was a schoolgirl then, in a navy blue jersey schoolgirl dress. Her attentive, innocent eyes, set wide in a grave young brow, were the precise color of the gentians. That repetition of color

and the eyes' innocent attentiveness stabbed Lewis like some too pure, too perfect note in music. It was the most beautiful child's face — or any face — of his memory. No wonder he remembered *that* so vividly! The short, straight nose, the upper lip — short to the exquisite point of breath-taking beauty — the Botticelli mouth, the strong, white, round chin! — The child was hardly human, she was so lovely! — Her head against the window's blue background was a sculptor's dream. Fine, very alive brown curls molded rather than obscured its classic contours. The gawky schoolgirl body, in its clinging jersey, was sculpture, too, with its wide shoulders and long thighs. . . .

Lewis had supposed, since, that the mood which took possession of him when Teresa Kerr had opened the door to the Farwells' Cambridge apartment, and which had increased like daylight upon dawn during the brief minutes he spent with those girls waiting for Mrs. Farwell to be ready to see him, was merely a state of *rapprochement* with their youth and happiness. Their relationship with life and with each other had by some miracle extended itself to him and created what at the time, and in memory ever since, had seemed a golden age circumscribed by a passing moment.

When the circumference contracted upon its enclosed eternity (these were Lewis' similes, far-fetched, of course, but for himself alone), it was by way of a trivial voice calling out from the next room. Then he left timelessness, passed through a door into a ceilinged, four-

walled space, and took a chair facing an emotional, pretty woman who lay relaxed among cushions on a chaise-longue; and at once, quite as if he had never passed through the sound of Teresa's laugh and the sight of Petra's attentive, innocent gaze to reach this meeting, he gave his complete attention to Mrs. Farwell and her woes.

She had these violent headaches. Weeks on end she could not sleep and then for other weeks she slept too much, could do nothing else but sleep. Her nerves needed either a stimulant or a sedative, constantly. But Doctor MacKay did not approve of drugs, not in the quantities her case demanded. Doctor MacKay said, "Exercise!" But she had this nervous heart. He admitted the nervous heart and yet insisted on the exercise. Imagine! Besides, how could she exercise? Riding was out of the question. Couldn't afford it. And golf bored her. Terribly! And what other exercise is there, besides golf and riding? They hadn't even a car. If they had, she might at least get some fresh air each day. But perhaps Doctor Pryne knew for himself — she was looking at his ready-made tweed suit — that fame did not pay in dollars and cents. Her husband's novels were only for the discriminating few. The better the review, she noticed, the smaller the royalties always. . . . And noises — cooped up in a cheap little apartment like this — noises were a sort of crucifixion!

A laugh, muffled by the closed door, but audible enough for demonstration, coincidentally bore her out.

Or so she imagined. She winced, becomingly, but genuinely enough.

"If only Petra could go away to school! She is my husband's daughter, you know. But we can't even afford a camp for her. And big girls like that are so noisy, so all over you! If she were a boy, she wouldn't be always at home. It would be easier then. If Doctor MacKay ever thinks I am strong enough to have a baby I do hope it will be a boy!"

Lewis listened to all of this and much more with attention. And not until Mrs. Farwell had worn herself out with the emotion which accompanied her eager, fluent explanations of her nervous condition, did he venture a few tentative suggestions. But it appeared that Doctor MacKay had made the very same suggestions dozens of times already, — and none of them were any good.

"Well then — ?" But it was only a mental question, a mental shrug. Lewis was grave and interested up till the very last. Doctor MacKay, however, had not had the slightest excuse for calling in a psychiatrist. It was an old story, but as disheartening and ridiculous as if it were the first occasion on which Lewis had wasted his time like this.

As it happened, the laugh which had penetrated Mrs. Farwell's closed door, with its crucifying effect on one of its hearers, was Lewis' last touch with Teresa and Petra. When he came out of Mrs. Farwell's bedroom

into the living room, they were gone. In their stead, a new individual — younger than Mrs. Farwell, older than the girls — was lying in wait for him. She had usurped Petra's place in the open blue window, but she quickly left it and came forward.

"I am Mrs. Tom Otis, Doctor Pryne. A friend of the Farwells. Mr. Farwell has commissioned me to see you in his place. He is at a critical point in the new novel, and if he leaves it, he's lost. You know how that is, since you write yourself. He is working in my house, — has his study there. He wants you to tell me your 'findings' here — if that's the word — and then, when he comes to earth again, I'm to report to him. Do you see?"

Mrs. Otis had spoken in a lowered voice in spite of Mrs. Farwell's closed door, and now she found a chair for herself with the obviously gracious intention of permitting Lewis to do the same. She appeared so altogether ingenuous a person that Lewis was fain to divert his irritation over the stupidity of the situation to the absent Lowell Farwell. Meanwhile he tried to get away from this Mrs. Otis as promptly and tactfully as possible.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm glad Mr. Farwell didn't interrupt his work. There's no reason why he should. Doctor MacKay will get in touch with me tomorrow and he'll give Mr. Farwell my 'findings' — such as they are, I suppose."

He was looking for his hat, but wondering about

Petra and Teresa. Why had they had to go away? He had meant to ask them where they had found the gentians.

"Here it is," Mrs. Otis moved aside, so that he saw the dish of gentians, and then his hat beside them. "But please don't go right away. Mr. Farwell will think I have failed him if you go without telling me what you think about Marian. It was stupid of me, perhaps, not to have explained myself more fully before I asked you to tell me. You couldn't understand, of course. You couldn't know how very close I am to these people. Why, it was I who persuaded them to get you. I couldn't bear the way things were going. Something had to be done. Doctor MacKay is so tiresomely conservative. Any wise, up-to-date doctor would have seen long ago that Marian Farwell ought to go right away — to a sanitarium — abroad — anywhere — but *away*. It isn't fair to let neurotics inflict their nerves on people who are perfectly sane and healthy. And it's all the worse when an extremely sensitive artist like Lowell Farwell is the victim! You think so too, don't you?"

But Mrs. Otis had not waited for Lewis' answer. She took his agreement for granted and hurried on. "Doctor Pryne, see here. I am so eager — and more important, perhaps — *able* to help. Did you think I was merely curious and officious? That would be too hateful of me, if it were true. But it isn't. This affair is almost as much mine as it is Lowell's — theirs, the Farwells', I mean. I got Mr. Farwell to call you in, I am paying

your fees, and I will send Marian abroad, anywhere, *to-morrow*, if you will only say the word. We — Society — owe to first-rate artists their chance for good working conditions. Well, you and I between us can manage things for this particular artist right now. He won't let me give Marian the money for Europe as things are, just for my urging it. But if *you* say she *must* go — Don't you see?"

Mrs. Otis had seemed to Lewis at the time a rather delightful person. A magnetic smile and an air of almost naïve simplicity had robbed what she said, and implied, of too much stupidity. And she went on to speak of her wealth with simplicity. "What use is all this money," she asked, eyes shining and wide, "if I can't do some ordinary human good with it outside of organized charity, and without fuss? What I can't spend myself — spend beautifully, I mean — certainly belongs to the next person who needs it. And Marian, poor darling, is really and truly my next person. It's as simple as that."

But Mrs. Farwell, to Lewis' mind, was neither mentally nor physically ill. She was a "happiness hound," nothing else in the world, and he could not honestly prescribe Europe or a sanitarium as a cure for a deeply rooted perversion in human character. Yet getting away without committing himself to coöperation in Mrs. Otis' naïve philanthropic schemes was difficult, the more so since he could not, of course, tell her his "findings." But Lewis managed it at last and Dick's errand here just now seemed to indicate that she had not stayed

permanently resentful, however she had felt at the time.

And then, before anything of his call at the Cambridge apartment had had time to fade from Lewis' memory, the papers were full of the divorce of Lowell and Marian Farwell. A little while more and two marriages were front-page news, Lowell Farwell to Mrs. Clare Otis *née* Fay, and Mrs. Marian Farwell, *née* Dodge to — somebody or other. The name hardly mattered since it was merely her recent connection with the celebrated novelist which gave the happiness hound's new marriage its ephemeral public interest. And now, less than three years after that so simple solution of their problems — and a wonder Mrs. Clare had not hit on it sooner and had ever bothered to try plotting with a psychiatrist! — she had Lewis again marked down as a fellow conspirator.

What did she want to buy from him this time, Lewis asked himself. Her stepdaughter's affection, according to Dick. But that would be only part of it. With three years for perspective, Lewis was more than a little doubtful of "Clare's" simplicity. But he could not guess what she might be wanting. It would be interesting to see, possibly. And in any case, there would be Petra. And Teresa Kerr. Who was Teresa Kerr, anyway, and where was she now, Lewis wondered. Well, Petra could tell him that. He would ask her on Saturday, the first thing.

To-day was only Wednesday. Three days, then, to go until he should see Petra. It seemed an unconscionably long time to wait. But why, then, had he let three years

go past without inquiring from Cynthia, or the dozen other people who could certainly have told him, what had become of Petra since Farwell's last marriage, and who was Teresa Kerr?

He turned sharply around, as if startled away from the window by astonishment at himself for this strangely belated impatience.



Chapter Three

GREEN DOORS LAY A FEW MILES BEYOND MEADOWBROOK, well away from the main highway on a meandering country road of its own. The new house had been built on the site of the old farmhouse which it had replaced, with its front door only a few paces from the road. In a general way the new house followed the contours of the old. The long, low lines of the sheds and the high, gabled lines of the barn — all house now — gave the place, as one came on it, a casual air of simplicity. It melted into the landscape as if it were painted on it. The white walls, shadowed by old, gnarled apple trees, were friendly with the dusty white country road, while the entire landscape of meadows and fields, with stretches of brook-cooled woodland, cradled the new dwelling as no changeling but its own child, in a peaceful lap. So Lewis at any rate felt as he arrived with Dick, in Dick's car, at tea time on that Saturday afternoon which had come, at last.

"That's Clare's guest house," Dick explained of a small one-story doll-house-like place directly across the

way from the big house. "It used to be the cow sheds. We found it amusing, having the estate cut in two by the public road, and we have used the road in our landscaping — up to the hilt. Autos almost never come this way, and the hay carts and occasional cows that do only add to the flavor. Isn't it jolly!"

"Very!" Lewis agreed. "And infinitely peaceful. Does Farwell write here at Green Doors?" He was contrasting the novelist's Cambridge home with this latest one and thinking that Clare appeared, at least on the surface, to have been successful in giving this particular artist an ideal environment for his creative ventures.

"Oh, yes. But in a little studio off in the woods. He made us build it according to his own ideas and Farwell's genius doesn't work along the lines of architecture. But such as it is, it's his own, and that's charm enough, I suppose. We've laughed over it quite a lot, Clare and I, but it's well out of sight and it doesn't matter what it looks like so very much, just so long as it serves its purpose. And it does that. The man practically lives there."

Lewis could not help thinking of his own books written in snatched minutes at his office, on trains, in hotel bedrooms in the dead of night with the call to sleep like a fire-engine siren shrieking a warning in his brain. But Farwell's was creative writing and that was a different sort altogether, necessitating leisure and solitude, at any price — possibly! But there Lewis pulled himself up. "Lord! This matter of price is none of my business!

They may be quite decent people at heart, really, and even happy!"

The front door had its step — a big, flat slate stone — a little below the level of the road. The hall into which one entered after so unpretentious an approach was almost startling in its palatial proportions. It was the height of the old barn, and the floor and the walls — with a balcony running around the second story on three sides — were made of composition which gave the effect of stone. In its own right, this great hall was a work of art; but on such a day as this, with the whole farther end opened to the New England countryside, it became merely a neutral frame for the garden, which, a mass of passionate color, cut a flaming swathe through a wooded valley to orchard-draped hills beyond.

The maid who had opened the door for them said, "Mrs. Farwell would like you to go through into the garden. She is under the elm."

The terrace, as they came to it, was merely an unroofed continuation of the floor of the great hall. It ended with wide slabs of flower-rimmed stone shelving down into grassy sweeps of hot June color. Off at one side, in a distant corner of the lawn, some Chinese garden chairs were grouped around a rustic table in the shade of a perfect wineglass elm. A little beyond, in the same shade, a woman in a white dress lay stretched in a long chair, her back to the house. A big garden hat, brilliant orange, was tossed on the grass beside her.

But Mrs. Farwell was not asleep, for she heard their

voices, and jumping up, came several steps out beyond the shade in her eagerness to welcome them.

"Petra and I were to play tennis. She was to have joined me here — oh — ages ago — and she hasn't, and I've just stayed on waiting all afternoon, and never dreamed it was tea time. Look at me!" — Mrs. Farwell meant apology for her crumpled, sleeveless frock, for her ankle socks on suntanned bare legs, for rather shabby sneakers. "I meant to change, of course. But the afternoon is a dream and I have been dreaming with it, since Petra never came. The child must not forget her tea date, though, and I don't think she will. She remembered you perfectly, Doctor Pryne, and seemed actually *pleased* that you were coming. — Yes, Richard! Petra *showed pleasure*. Doesn't that sound propitious?"

She stood for another minute out in the glare where she had met her guests, looking hopefully toward the house, as if half expecting Petra's arrival to coincide with theirs. "Lowell too!" she murmured. "My husband was terribly pleased you were coming, Doctor Pryne. But time doesn't exist for him when he is working. He will be sure to turn up, though. He has no intention of missing you — this time."

Then she shaded her brow with her palm and, turning suddenly to Dick, smiled deliberately and sweetly into his eyes. Lewis wished he had been looking somewhere else when this happened. She led them back to the chairs and herself took the one nearest the tea table.

His hostess was not nearly so pretty as Lewis remem-

bered her. But she was much more than pretty! Yes — sitting upright against the fantastic high back of the Chinese chair, in her sleeveless white frock, her hair black as the lacquer of the wickerwork, her very long, curving lashes black, dipped in gold, and dimples subtly hinted in her thin cheeks — she was vital and engaging.

But specious! — Lewis quickly added. Before, when he had thought her rather beautiful and certainly naïvely ingenuous, he had been looking at her through the beginning of twilight in a city apartment. But this second time her background was an elm and the light was of broad day. That changed things somewhat. Lewis did not particularly enjoy his present skepticism. But he could not help himself. And his next unhallowed thought was "Poor Dick!" For the latest Mrs. Farwell's particular variety of predatoriness was of the sort that relishes a spiritual flavor to its meat; so Lewis, at any rate, hazarded. The bodies, even the hearts of men, would not be enough: Clare Farwell would demand the soul before all.

"Pretty selfish of Petra to waste your afternoon for you like this!" Dick exclaimed. He turned to Lewis. "You can see for yourself how it is. You've run right onto it, first thing, without our showing you. It's always like this. This is the way Petra treats Clare."

"Oh, Richard! Please! How horrid that sounds. It's a little unjust as well. This time I am almost certain she really and genuinely forgot I was waiting for her. Her offering to play with me at all was generous. Petra is a

hum-dinger at tennis, Doctor Pryne, and I am only fair-ish. So it's not much fun for her, playing with me. This is probably the truth of it: Petra wanted to be nice, then her subconscious mind got busy making her forget and so saved her from having to be nice. Doctor Pryne will tell you, Richard, that the hardest things not to forget are the duties which bore us." She was laughing but in spite of that she meant them to believe her serious.

Clare *would* call Dick "Richard." Given her type, it was almost inevitable. Lewis wondered why it had taken him so unaware and why it need so irritate him. And it was also inevitable — but for this he had been totally unprepared — that she would overtly exonerate the slandered Petra and in the very act make it look worse for the child. For she was a person who could have her cake and eat it too, every time. It was a trick act, peculiar to the type. . . . But Lewis liked his own critical self less and less in exact ratio as he found himself liking Petra's stepmother less and less. He wished he had never had to see her by daylight.

"Subconscious mind nothing!" Dick scoffed. "Clare, you're always making excuses for everybody, but most of all for Petra. Couldn't she *see* you waiting out here all afternoon from every window in the house? Wouldn't that circumvent her subconscious forgettery mechanisms?"

"Oh yes, if she were in the house, my dear Richard. But she may have gone for a walk. Now, though, she'll be back, dressing for this party of ours. *I* should have!"

"Well, I only wish I had known you were just waiting around here for nothing!" Dick was thoroughly upset. "I've been spoiling for exercise all afternoon. Cynthia insisted it was too hot to play, Harry stuck at his bank, and Lewis couldn't be torn from Marlboro Street one minute ahead of time. But I'm sleeping at the Allens' to-night, after Petra's dance. How about a game to-morrow morning?"

"But my dear boy, to-morrow is Sunday," Clare reminded him. Then, to Lewis, she explained, almost with a blush, "Don't be shocked, Doctor Pryne. I never impose my religious idiosyncrasies on others, not even on my family. One doesn't! And I don't even carry my peculiarity to the point of going to church — do I, Richard? Oh, yes, I do really, only not" — she laughed — "the Meadowbrook Congregational Church! Green Doors is my church.

"I know an orchard, old and rare,
I will not tell you where,
With green doors opening to the sun,
And the sky children gather there —

"I can slip away, with a volume of essays or poetry, stretch out anywhere in the grass and sun on one of those slopes up there, and feel God nearer than He would ever come to me in the four walls of any church on earth, even the most beautiful cathedral. My husband says that that's pagan. Perhaps it is. I am pagan, I think. But words for one's religion don't matter, do they! I

know what I know, and I feel what I feel, and it is — beautiful."

Then, laughing again, she asked, "What church do you go to, on Sundays, Doctor Pryne? Not one built by men, any more than I, I'm sure. You too are beyond that kindergarten point in evolution. You see, I know you much better than you can even begin to know me, for I have read your books!"

Good Lord! What had Lewis' books to say of his religion? They were austere psychological, made up of the findings and the theories of a practising psychiatrist. The philosophical humility in all his writing was Lewis' pride. But he was saved the trouble of defending his pride just then, even if he had thought it worth the trouble, for Clare's stepdaughter, Petra, had come down the terrace steps and was hurrying across the lawn.

"Imagine Clare calling herself the mother of that!" Dick laughed — and Lewis, somehow, knew that the remark and its accompanying mirth was probably as familiar at this tea table as was Clare's explanation of her individualistic out-of-doors worship.

Clare murmured hurriedly, softly — her fingers just touching Lewis' coat sleeve as she leaned toward him — "Richard is only teasing me. He knows perfectly well that I'm not flattered. I am thirty years old and have no ambition to compete with Petra's *lovely youth*. What I long to be is a mother to her, a real one. How I long for it! But I need your help, Doctor Pryne. You will see how I need it. . . ."

Petra, when she reached the shade of the elm, was constrained and even a little awkward. But that was hardly surprising. All three of them had watched her approach from the instant that she had come down the terrace steps, and she might very well have felt that Clare's murmurings in Lewis' ear, and even more, Dick's laugh, concerned herself.

"Darling!" Clare exclaimed, smiling up at her through her really fascinating lashes. "What a perfectly enchanting frock! It's new! And you never showed it to me! And look at me! I haven't even changed! — This is my daughter, grown up, since you saw her, Doctor Pryne. Sit down quickly, darling. It's too hot to keep the men standing. And here's the tea. Draw your chairs to the table. — You needn't stay to pass things, Elise." She threw a warm, grateful smile to the maid who had brought out the tray. The look she won in return was humbly idolizing.

Lewis held a chair out for Petra, and when she took it, drew his own along beside it.

The gawky schoolgirl body had rounded into self-conscious maturity. Otherwise Petra was exactly the girl of Lewis', in this case strangely explicit, memory . . . until she turned from him and the intense gentian blue of her eyes no longer blurred his power for deeper perception. Then he saw that the attentive fairy-tale gaze was quite gone; or if there was attentiveness there now, it was not bent on a happy, mystery-brimmed world before the girl's face, but on a realm within. Childlike

receptiveness was transformed to a look of reserve made vivid. The utter beauty of the remembered child face was there — intact — but it no longer took one's breath; it was protected by this vivid reserve as by a sword, on guard.

But Lewis was not sorry for the sword. He saw that it would, at any rate, keep her safe from Clare. He knew that Youth often has need of its seeming hardness until years give it some chance to acquire a little subtlety in its denials, if it is to protect with any success the inner, personal development of its own integrity.

Lewis took the teacup and saucer Clare handed him. He helped himself to toast and strawberry jam. He laughed, amusedly, at some remark or other of "Richard's," and could even have repeated the witticism word for word if it had been required of him. But in spite of all this overt conformity to the social requirements of those first minutes since Petra's arrival under the elm and his holding her chair for her, he was conscious of one thing only, the young girl's living, breathing, *still* self, there at his side.



Chapter Four

IT WAS DICK WHO BROUGHT UP THE BROKEN TENNIS date, not Clare. Petra came out of her stillness to show a mild surprise. "But I thought it wasn't definite," she turned to Clare. "I thought we were to play if we felt like it when the time came. And then it was so hot!"

The breath of silence which Clare allowed to follow this and the expression which crossed her face spoke an acute surprise on her part; but it was quickly followed by a seeming desire to shield Petra from anybody's criticism, even her own. Tactfully she changed the subject to ask, "What did you do all afternoon, darling? It has been deliciously hot." And then to Lewis, "I'm like Shelley. I adore hot summer days and am more alive then than ever." — But she repeated her question to Petra: "What did you do with yourself all afternoon, darling?"

Petra answered, after a momentary hesitation, as if she needed the pause in which to choose between several possible replies, "After lunch I took a book and went off in the woods, where it was cool — and read."

"That was nice. What book, darling?"

"'Marius, the Epicurean.'"

"Really! It's years since I've even looked into it. I should love to read some of 'Marius' with you, sometime, Petra. Why don't we? I'll take it to bed with me to-night, skim through as far as you have gone to refresh my memory, and then, to-morrow, we will go on with it together. Petra, yes! You come to my church with me to-morrow morning, early, and we'll read 'Marius.' Where did you leave the book?"

Wild color flaming in Petra's cheeks took Lewis by surprise. Again that hesitation before answering her step-mother's simple question. "I'm afraid I left it in the woods — somewhere. I'll find it before people begin coming to-night. I might go and look now?"

"Oh, no. Not now. Of course not. At least, it depends on what copy you took. Was it your father's specially bound copy?"

"No. — I don't think so."

"My darling! You must know what your book looked like! If it was my Modern Library edition, of course it doesn't matter a bit, — though it has my notes in it! Where did you find the one you used? In the library or my sitting room?"

Petra's eyes met Lewis'. She found his look completely, absorbedly hers. She took a grip on that absorption, steadied herself by it, and answered Clare. "I don't remember where I found it, but it hasn't your notes. It's not your copy. And it's not Father's. It's my own."

"But it must be your father's or mine. There are only those two copies of Pater in the house. I don't see —"

But suddenly Clare did appear to see and broke off. Indeed, an expression of seeing all too well had passed wavelike over her quicksilver face. She turned to Lewis as if to distract attention from what she had suddenly seen, and perhaps, too, from Petra's hot cheeks, and asked him whether he had read her husband's latest novel. He had and began talking about it. But he wanted to take Petra's hand, where it lay on her chair arm, and close his down on it with strength. He did not care about what he surmised was a mere silly schoolgirl fib. If she wanted to impress Clare and Dick — even himself — with the seriousness of her reading, what of it! At least, she did not lie subtly, through the medium of fleeting quicksilver changes of facial expression. Hardly. The cheek he barely allowed himself to see was one flame — as if an angel had lied.

Tea and a protracted discussion of Lowell Farwell's novels came to an end in time, and Lewis at last could turn to Petra with: "I want to hear something about Teresa. Or must I say Miss Kerr? — But I'm not going to 'Miss' you, Petra, if you don't mind. Until to-day I have never thought of one of you girls without the other. Shall I meet her too, again? I hope so."

But something was wrong, terribly wrong. This, surely, was not a question Petra would need to make up an answer for! But she was not even trying to make up an answer. She was looking, almost wildly, toward Clare.

Clare laughed. "Why, Petra! You never told me you and Doctor Pryne had mutual friends! Teresa —?"

"Yes. Teresa Kerr." Lewis spoke shortly, dryly, because of his complete astonishment at Petra's ill-concealed panic.

"Oh!" Clare remembered. Suddenly, it seemed. "That must have been the maid. Petra, I wonder what has become of Teresa? You were David and Jonathan once, you two. You were a funny child, my dear, when I first knew you in Cambridge — and so beautifully democratic! But I'm afraid we can't tell you anything about the girl, Doctor Pryne. The whereabouts of vanished domestics is as much a problem as that of all safety pins. Richard! Do you remember Felix Fairfax, our inimitable butler! I wonder what has become of him! My husband made me get rid of him, Doctor Pryne, because he helped himself to one of my photographs and had it in his room. I wrote him a recommendation that was a marvel, though. Anybody who couldn't read between the lines deserved what they got. . . ."

Petra, who until this moment had tasted nothing, now took up her cold cup of tea and drank thirstily, while Dick and Clare became mildly hilarious over a growing volume of anecdotes concerning the inimitable Felix Fairfax, the flirtatious, vanished and banished butler, whom Lewis' question about Teresa had brought to mind.

Lewis was silent. He was not looking at Petra, but he knew instinctively when she lost her strange, inexplicable fear, and relaxed. A baby, with a pretty young

nurse in its wake, was running down the lawn, toward the tea table. Petra had been the first to notice the invasion and welcomed the diversion it brought. Then Clare, following Petra's eyes, saw the baby.

"Little Sophia!" she cried, quickly on her feet, while anecdotes of Felix Fairfax hung broken off in mid-air. She ran forward a few steps and knelt on the grass, her arms spread wide to receive her little daughter. In that gracious moment Clare was like nothing in the world but a dancing Greek figure on some lovely old vase — all quicksilver, grace and charm. Dick's face glowed appreciatively. Even Lewis, for that minute, was aware of Clare's loveliness.

The baby, however, made a swooping detour to avoid the wide-flung, slender arms of the kneeling mother and plunged straight for Petra, her big half-sister. Petra held her off, at arm's length. "You've been in the brook. You're dirty. You're muddy. Don't touch my dress. No!"

The rebuffed cherub commenced to wail but Petra did not relent and draw her into her arms. "No! No!" She repeated it. "Mustn't spoil Petra's beautiful, clean dress. No. *I'm not going to pick you up.*"

Then Clare swept down upon them and snatched the baby up. Two muddy palms immediately made their mark on the shoulders of her white frock. But she lifted the delicious little hands and kissed them, one after the other, gravely — delicately. Her eyes, over the baby's golden head, looked at Petra now with healthy, open accusation, and she held the delicious little body more

and more tightly to her, while small wet shoes muddled her skirt.

Clare, looking away from Petra at last, met Doctor Pryne's puzzled eyes. "I'm going to take little Sophia up to the nursery, if you'll excuse me for only a few minutes," she said. "Anyway, I wanted you to see our guest house — the view at its back. You get the river there. Petra will show you. And this is a good time — before Lowell comes along. — Richard, you may come up with us and see what a nice supper a nice cook has sent up to a nice nursery for an adorable baby! Only first we'll help a nice nurse to wash these precious, dirty paws. . . . No, Richard, I want to carry her myself. Truly. You don't mind, Doctor? I always run up to the nursery at little Sophia's supper time, even in the middle of quite formal parties. But it only takes a few minutes."

Her eyes, on Lewis', were replete with meaning. "Now is your time," they said. "Do make a beginning at helping me understand this strange girl. You can't deny she is lacking in normal responses. Help me!"

"Good-by, sister," Petra murmured, and went near enough to lay her cheek for just a breath against her little sister's hair. "I couldn't let you spoil my pretty dress, honey. But I do love you!"

At this belated gesture, Clare's beseeching look at Lewis transformed itself to one of ironic amusement.

"If you are really interested in the view, Doctor Pryne, it's across the road. We can go through the kitchen

garden. That is shorter than going back through the house."

The kitchen garden, through which Petra led him, was a jungle of drooping, white-starred blackberry canes. They came out of it through a little wicket gate and crossed the intimate, idle road to the guest house opposite.

"Clare won't let them cut the grass here," Petra explained. "Any objection to wading?" Lewis had none and followed the girl around the side of the little house and came to an uncovered piazza at the back. Ignoring the several chairs arranged with an eye to the view there, they sat down side by side on the edge of the piazza boards. From under their feet wide sweeps of June fields surged away in many-colored rippling waves. White and yellow daisies, red and white clovers, golden buttercups, orange devil's-paintbrush, and sparkling sun-soaked grass dazzled Lewis' eyes against the view of river and blue hills beyond.

"Paradise will be a June field like this," he thought, "with the saints reuniting while the angels dance." He was thinking of Fra Angelico's "Last Judgment," the detail of the left corner. — "Petra and I seem to have arrived somewhat ahead of time, though, — and, God knows, without our crowns! This girl! She is a breaker of promises, a vain poser, a liar, a traitor to friendship, and a repulser of innocent babyhood. Clare made her do her paces. Just didn't she, though!"

But his next thought was more like shock than thought.

"Why need her hands be as lovely as her face? Or is this Paradise!" They were clasped about her knees, strong, sun-tanned hands, with long, squarish-tipped fingers. Angelic hands!

Lewis remarked, "It's nice here."

Petra agreed, "Yes, isn't it!"

Lewis lighted a cigarette and Petra pulled a grass blade to make a bracelet, bending forward from lithe hips.

"You thought I was horrid to my baby sister, didn't you, Doctor Pryne?" she asked bluntly. "I wasn't, not really. But I couldn't let her spoil my dress, could I? This is the first time I've worn it. It would have to be dry-cleaned if I had picked her up. And things are never so nice again after they are dry-cleaned. Besides, I can't afford it."

The dress she had so ruthlessly protected against a bewitching baby was smooth silk, the color of heavy cream. Its only decoration was a flight of embroidered gold and brown bees. They flew up one full sleeve from wristband to shoulder, across the back of the neck and down the other body-side of the frock to the lower edge of the hem. It was — taken by itself — a lovely frock, and if it had not been so utterly Petra's own, belonged so completely to her shapely young body and coloring, even Lewis — no connoisseur in women's clothes — would have noticed its lovely detail before this.

Petra dropped her grass bracelet — half made — into the grass and picked up the hem of her skirt, folding it

back. "Look," she said, "how beautifully finished it is."

The flight of bees had been carried on, in all its careful perfection, to the upper edge of the hem on its inner side, where it would never show. It was as if the embroiderer had loved her work too well to realize when she had done enough.

"Clare's dress was nothing at all," Petra was saying. "It didn't matter what little Sophia did to it. Besides, if Clare ruined a dozen dresses, it wouldn't matter. She could buy dozens more. . . . So it wasn't fair, was it?"

"No. It was hardly fair," Lewis agreed absently.

Petra jumped up. The bee-embroidered hem of her skirt brushed through the flowers in the deep grass. She came closer to Lewis, stood there before him in the long grass.

"Could you spare me a cigarette?" she asked.

She had not smoked at the tea table and Lewis had taken it for granted she was that rare thing, a modern girl who did not smoke. Apologetically, he offered her his opened cigarette case and struck a match for her on the piazza boards. (The grateful patient should have given Lewis a lighter along with the case!) But he might as well have kissed her as have held the light for her, — with his face like that. Even before the girl saw Lewis' face, she felt what was there for her to see. Her eyelids swept up, to verify her suddenly alert instinct, and for just that instant blue reticence, under Lewis' own startled eyes, leapt into blue flame. . . . Petra drew a

little away, trying to smile and utterly failing. Lewis lighted a fresh cigarette for himself.

Petra puffed at hers for a minute only and then it went the way the bracelet had gone, only she bent to press out the spark — firmly, securely — into damp grass roots. Returning to her place, she clasped her hands around her knees again and explained.

"Really I don't know how to smoke, not gracefully. You shouldn't have watched me! You made me feel hypocritical, watching me like that. But I do smoke, sometimes. Almost every night. One or two cigarettes after dinner with Father. So I wasn't pretending, you see . . ."

She went on, after a minute, "You asked me about Teresa, remember? I'll tell you now. I couldn't say a word with Clare listening. But Clare lied about her. She knows perfectly well that Teresa wasn't our maid — not in the sense that that Fairfax person was Clare's butler, I mean. Teresa was nothing in the world but our guardian angel, — father's, Marian's, and mine. And she is my best friend."

Lewis said coolly, "Yes, of course! I knew that. I saw that it was so, that afternoon in Cambridge. And when Mrs. Farwell said that Teresa was gone out of your life like a lost safety pin I knew it couldn't be true. But *why* did she say it? And why did you let her say it?"

"Oh, Clare wasn't lying when she said that. She thought, I mean, that it was true enough. It was in say-

ing Teresa was our maid, putting her with Felix Fairfax, — that was the lie. But so far as Clare knows, Teresa is gone — just as absolutely as any disappearing safety pin. I wish I were as elusive, — that Clare had mislaid me too. But she has a use for me. She thinks she has, anyway, and she actually pays me a wage of two thousand dollars a year to live here at Green Doors and be a model stepdaughter.” — Petra flashed a defiant look at Lewis and added, “I’m different from Clare’s other servants, you see. I don’t adore her!”

The girl’s hands, Lewis noticed, were no longer clasping her knees. They were gripping them. But he gave no sign that he was conscious of her anger and her rebellion.

“Will you just listen to that bird,” he said. “Bobolinks are usually cheerful, of course. But this fellow is carrying it beyond reason, it seems to me! He might have a peephole into heaven, — the way he sounds.” For a bobolink, apparently beside himself with rapture, was circling and swooping, swooping and circling, singing his jetty little throat to bursting. His nest must be hidden somewhere in the grass not a dozen yards from where they sat on the piazza’s edge.

Petra tilted her head to see the speck of song against the sunlight. She stayed silent until the rapture ended and the heaven-glimpser sank home. She even waited a minute or two beyond that sudden silence before she said, but calmly now, her twined fingers relaxing their grip, “My friend, Teresa, is like that bobolink’s

song. At least, she’s as happy as that. Jolly as that. I’ll tell you about her, Doctor Pryne. I am glad that you think of us together. I adore her, of course. She was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and she lived there till she was fifteen. Her father and mother kept a day school for boys. But Teresa had four sisters and they all went to the boys’ school. There were three brothers. Eight children in Teresa’s family, you see . . .”



Chapter Five

LEWIS LISTENED, WITHOUT LOOKING AT PETRA. AS SHE told him about Teresa, they were both watching for another flight of the bobolink, their eyes focused on the delicately waving tide of grass above the hidden nest. Hearing Petra's voice, this way, without looking at her, Lewis learned as much about her as she was telling him about Teresa; for her voice had none of the reticence of her gentian eyes nor the stubborn power of her rounded chin. It was a gentle voice, clipped and ingenuous. Above all ingenuous. What her face had lost with childhood her voice had strangely taken on. It had a listening, attentive quality. Lewis, in the practice of his profession, had gradually acquired a habit of separating voices from their possessors. He had discovered that while the face and the very pose and carriage of a person may deceive, the human voice simply cannot. It is the materialization of personality into sound waves.

" . . . Eight children. Teresa's mother had taught the fifth grade in a public school in Cambridge. Teresa's father was Scotch. They met when Mr. Kerr was over

here working for a doctor's degree at Harvard. He came from Edinburgh. They fell so much in love that they couldn't wait for the degree but got married and went to Edinburgh and started the day school. But it didn't pay except just in the beginning. By the time all eight children were there in the Kerr family, they began to be really poor. The Kerr children themselves were half the school, you see. Teresa was the oldest. When Teresa was fifteen, they gave up the school in Edinburgh and returned to Cambridge. Teresa's father got all the tutoring he could do. He was a magnificent teacher. They lived in a five-room apartment on Lawrence Street, all crowded in, but soon they moved to Boston and had a bigger place, in the top floor of a tenement on Bates Street.

"Teresa's mother and father taught the children as they had done in Scotland. Only her mother did most of it, of course, because her father was away tutoring all day. But the Kerrs had their own ideas about education and didn't want the children to go to public school. They wanted them to learn Greek and Latin, you see, almost in their cradles. But Teresa did go to High School. She was fifteen when they came to America and her father let her go into the Senior Class in the High School just so she could get a diploma that June. After school she helped with the housework and helped with the children's lessons too.

"That January two of Teresa's sisters died, the two who came next her in age. They had T B anyway, the

doctor said, but they actually died of pneumonia. Very suddenly. They had been Teresa's playmates. The rest of the children were more like her babies, she took so much care of them. But Teresa stayed out of school only one week when they died. She needed her diploma, you see, because she was going to go on through college and become a teacher.

"... Well, but when spring came ... something terrible happened ... It is too terrible to tell. But if Teresa bore it, I guess you can bear hearing it, Doctor Pryne. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes," Lewis urged. "I want to hear," but added with quick compunction, "if it doesn't hurt you too much, Petra," — and was utterly astonished by the devastating look Petra gave him. But her scorn was for herself.

"Hurt me too much!" she exclaimed. "I only wish it could hurt me! Really hurt me! It is too terrible that one person had to bear it all alone. And Teresa, of all people! When she is so happy, so jolly — and loves God more than all the rest of the people I know put together love Him! It was to her it happened. *All I'm doing is tell it!*

"The twenty-third of April, the Principal of the High School sent for Teresa to come to his office before she went home. He told her that she was to graduate with very highest honors and that he had got a Radcliffe scholarship for her. It was Teresa's birthday. She was sixteen. Teresa could hardly wait to get home to tell her mother all the Principal had said. It would be Teresa

giving a birthday present to her mother, you see. Mothers should have presents even more than the children they have borne should have them, Teresa thinks. For the mothers remember the birthdays and the children can't. . . . She ran as fast as she could, the minute she got out of the subway. She didn't care if people stared at a grown-up girl racing through the streets. She wanted so to get there with the wonderful news. There was a crowd of people at the end of her street held back by ropes. The air was full of smoke . . ."

Again the bobolink soared, cascading rapture. Petra stopped telling about Teresa's sixteenth birthday and listened and watched with Lewis. But this time she did not wait for the music to sink and fall away home; after a breath or two she went on, her voice of necessity raised a little, indenting itself through the bobolink's Gloria.

"The whole building where the Kerr family lived was burned down to the pavement. Somebody told Teresa that everybody had escaped except a woman who lived in the top-story corner tenement and her six children. They had all been burned alive. They came to the windows too late for the fire ladders to reach them. They must have been asleep when the fire started and waked too late. The alarm was sounded a little after eight. Yes . . . Teresa had left her mother and all the children sleeping deeply. She and her father had got breakfast together and gone out with infinite care not to wake them, — she to school, he to his work in Cambridge. The baby had had croup during the night, you see, and the

whole family had been disturbed by it. Even the younger children. Teresa's mother had made a tent with sheets over the crib, and boiled a kettle in it, and toward dawn it was over and the baby was sleeping. The police had learned there were six children in the family and that was why they said six were burned. But Teresa, you see, had gotten up early. She and her father. They had been at infinite pains — I told you that — not to wake the others. *Infinite pains*. The baby was sleeping naturally, breathing softly when they stole out.

"It was a policeman who told Teresa about how the mother and 'six' children had come to the window. He had seen them himself. . . . But a priest shoved him one side. That was Father Donovan. He was their parish priest. The Kerrs were Catholic. Teresa is a Catholic. Teresa couldn't pray. But Father Donovan's praying was really hers. He said, 'My mother, *my* brothers and sisters, *my* baby brother. May perpetual light shine upon them.' . . . They gave Teresa brandy. In the rectory. They put it in hot tea. The housekeeper rubbed her feet and hands, while Father Donovan called up all the places her father might be. Father Donovan had thought the police had made certain when they said that all *six* Kerr children had come to the window, and until Teresa got there, you see, he had no way of tracing her father. But now Teresa gave the names and addresses. Finally somebody said yes — Mr. Kerr was there. Father Donovan said, 'Then keep him and don't let him know anything until I come. I must tell him. Nobody else.' But

the people didn't wait, — or something happened. I don't know what. I can't ask Teresa. Perhaps she doesn't know. Whether he died of the shock or whether he killed himself — thinking all were burned . . . All that Teresa said was 'Father Donovan was in time to give him absolution.'

"Father Donovan boarded Teresa with his housekeeper's sister. And she went on and got her diploma and graduated from High School with very highest honors in June. Nobody came to her graduation for by then Father Donovan was dying of cancer. He had not told Teresa until he had to. When he found he couldn't go to the graduation, you see, he told her. She took her diploma right to him. She ran to the rectory the minute she was out. He blessed her and was as delighted and proud as her mother would have been, Teresa says, and her father, and her brothers and sisters. He told her that his death would not be even an interruption to his prayers for her goodness and happiness, and he asked her to pray for him always, all her life. He died early the next morning. . . .

"The week after Father Donovan died Marian found Teresa through an employment agency, and she went to Cape Cod for the summer with us. That was the summer Marian began to be ill. Teresa and I did the work and took care of her, and swam all the rest of the time. I taught Teresa to swim and she was simply mad about it. Marian had melancholia and Father was terribly unhappy that summer. And I was selfish and cross,

having to wash so many dishes. . . . *But Teresa was happy!* . . . Yes, it is true. She was the one who was happy. . . . But gradually, I grew terribly happy too, because of her. She didn't tell us anything about her family or what had happened to them, only that they were dead. Whenever I asked her about her brothers and sisters who had died, she put me off. And Marian never asked her anything, I think. She had merely hired somebody who was to be one of the family and work for less money because of that privilege. But above all, Marian had chosen Teresa from all the other applicants for the job at the agency because she seemed the most *cheerful*.

"In September, when we went back to Cambridge, Teresa wanted to use her scholarship and enter Radcliffe. But Marian needed her so much and had come to depend on her for everything so much — but most of all it was her cheerfulness she needed — that Teresa gave up college for that year and stayed on with us. But she told Father and me, then, when she decided to stay on with us, about the fire, and about the two sisters who had died of pneumonia, and about how her mother and father had wanted her to go to college. Father said that she must go, of course, but that she was surely young enough to wait a year. He was appalled about the fire and said she must never tell Marian. It would be too harrowing. And he was very sorry I had heard it. . . .

"The summer after that we couldn't afford the cottage on the Cape and we stayed on in Cambridge. That

was bad for Marian. All the time that she was in the apartment she spent in her bedroom on her chaise-longue. But it was frightfully hot and she would get wildly nervous and go out then to luncheons and tea dances and places — looking very gay and well. But it was only a false, nervous strength, the doctor said. . . .

"Then that fall you came, Doctor Pryne. Teresa and I were so relieved! But you didn't have a chance. Marian went away, and there was the divorce. But she went away without saying anything to Teresa and me. We came back from a day in the country in time to get dinner that afternoon, and she was gone. That evening Father explained it all to us — in words of one syllable, you know, — what had happened.

"Teresa took it so hard that I don't remember how I felt about it. I didn't feel anything, I think. I was so surprised to hear Teresa *crying* that that was all I thought about, really. It was as if the world was shaking under us — under Father and me — with Teresa, of all people, crying. But Father was angry with Teresa. She said, you see, that he must bring Marian back. He said he would not think of doing any such thing — that she had a right to her freedom, if she wanted it. Teresa started crying when Father said to us, 'I can honestly say I am happy in Marian's happiness and I think she has done exactly right. It's sheer stupidity for people who are not happy together to go on pretending they are. It is happiness that matters. There's at least one person the happier in the world to-night, and any one

who really and genuinely cares for her must be glad for her, — even if it means separation from her, of a sort, and for a time. And after the divorce goes through, you know, there's no reason in the world why we shouldn't all be as good friends as ever.'

"But Teresa cried just exactly as if somebody was dead. And this time Father Donovan was dead too and could not pray her prayers for her, while she cried. That is what I thought, I remember, though I didn't understand why she was crying like that. I was terribly frightened by her crying like that — and Father's walking the floor so white and angry with her.

"Clare came in about then. I think Father called her up and asked her to come, to help him with Teresa. She made Teresa drink some water. And then, when Teresa was quiet, she said, 'You are a self-righteous, ignorant girl. Mr. Farwell has the patience of a saint but this is more than he can bear. — He is going to give you a month's wages and you must go away. You are only making things that are hard for him already much harder.'

"I went with Teresa while she packed her suit cases. Clare called up Morris Place House and told them to get a room ready for Teresa. She is a trustee there. She ordered the taxi too, and told us when it came. She took everything in charge, as if she were in Marian's place already. But Teresa told the taxi-driver to go somewhere else, not Morris Place House. She wasn't crying any more but she looked ghastly. She wouldn't let me go

away with her but she promised never to forsake me. And she never has. She is my guardian angel. . . . But Clare doesn't know any more about Teresa now — how she is, where she is — than she told you she did. And she's not going to know. That is *something* I can do for Teresa. . . . But you asked about her, Doctor Pryne. You remembered her. And now I have told you about her . . . I really wanted to . . ."

The bobolink's Gloria had reached its climax minutes ago and ceased. Petra's voice — when she had come to telling how Clare had discharged Teresa and sent her away, "as if she were in Marian's place already" — had taken on the reticence of her eyes. It was not her personality any more — that voice — not as it had been. But the girl's eyes, now that both she and the bobolink were silent, and Lewis looked at her, were thick with tears.

"But what did Teresa do? Was it too late to get into Radcliffe that fall? I suppose so. That was late autumn — nearly three years ago. What did Teresa do? Where did she go?"

Lewis had to know. Teresa had become increasingly real and important to him with every word that Petra had said of her. Petra must go on, must tell it all, even if she did cry, doing it.

But there were no tears in her voice. "Yes, it was too late for Radcliffe. Father had again, you see, persuaded her to wait another year. But I went to see her the next morning and she had a plan. She had decided to get

some kind of job — any kind — until she could begin earning her way through Radcliffe in the shortest time possible. In the end she meant to be a private secretary and I would go and live with her. Then I would begin going to Business School. We would both be independent and I needn't live with Clare and Father. After Teresa had gone away in the taxi, they told me, you see, that they were going to be married as soon as the divorces went through, — so it was a very relieving idea, to live with Teresa and earn my own living. Teresa started in to make it come true right away. And it was coming true. She was all ready to graduate when — ”

Petra broke off there, jumping up as if a bell had rung for her, and her first duty in life was to answer it. But it was only Dick Wilder, whistling to them from the road.

“Teresa was all ready to graduate and what happened? It doesn't matter about Dick. Go on.” Lewis was impatient at the interruption.

“But they want us. Clare has sent him for us. She thinks I have kept you too long,” Petra whispered, and promised, quickly, under her breath, “I will tell you what happened the minute we are alone again. I want to tell you. I want your advice, Doctor Pryne. Things have happened. — But not now. Teresa is a secret here at Green Doors. From Dick Wilder too. From everybody.”

Dick had come around the side of the house. “Why didn't you sing out?” he inquired, astonished at finding

them there. “I thought you must have passed up our famous view and gone somewhere else, you two! Lowell has turned up at last. But whatever — ”

Dick was silenced by a fresh astonishment. This was stranger than their hiding and not answering, — Petra crying. Of all things! And even Lewis was not quite himself. Well, Dick knew nothing to do about it other than to recommence talking faster than ever — which he did — and somehow hurry them back to the elm and Clare's management. He began explaining, very swiftly and at some length, as they went, how little Sophia had refused to let anybody but her mother feed her her supper, and that that was why they — he and Clare — had been gone such an unconscionably long while themselves, and how, taking everything together, he was afraid that Petra's father was feeling that they hadn't any of them much realized that he had broken off his work half an hour ahead of the usual time to join them at tea, since nobody was anywhere near the tea table when he came up from his studio.

Petra may have heard something of Dick's nervous chatter. Lewis heard nothing. Left to himself, he would never have been so docile under Dick's high-handedness, of course. But Petra had shown such a passionate will to obedience from the instant of the summoning whistle that there was nothing else for Lewis but to seem docile too.

And here they were back on the lawn again, going down toward the group of chairs under the elm. Lowell

Farwell had risen and was standing, waiting for them. He was more imposing even than the published portraits. His leonine mane of frosty curls, his elegant but wide shoulders, his height — and as they reached the shade and were near enough — his luminous black eyes under striking black brows, were the concrete and visible aspects of a personality to conjure with.



Chapter Six

LEWIS HAD DINED WITH HIS SISTER AND HER FAMILY and now he and she were promenading her piazza. Cynthia was like her name, fragrantly feminine, blond and delightful, a cool petaled flower of New England. They caught glimpses of Harry, her banker husband, as they passed and repassed the living-room windows. He was lying back in what might very well be the world's most comfortable chair, reading the financial pages of the *Transcript*, smoking his Corona, and supposedly enjoying the jazz music which came blaring to him from a Boston hotel through his radio; he had only to raise a hand — no need even to lift his head — to turn the knob which would produce a decent quiet.

"I always promise myself when I'm here that I will come oftener," Lewis was saying. "Then I get so devilish busy I don't manage it. But now, Cynthia, it may be different. You may be seeing too much of me."

"That's nice. I should love to see too much of you. But *why now?* Oh! Green Doors, of course! And I've been trying to get you to go over there with me for a

year or more! You see why, now, don't you! It's fascinating, isn't it! I feel, sometimes, when I'm there, that the very air is charged with a sort of electricity, if you know what I mean, which you don't, since it doesn't express what I mean. But it's all high spots, somehow. We must seem commonplace to them, Harry and I. But Clare is sweet to us, all the same. Even Lowell Farwell doesn't seem bored. He and Harry discuss international affairs, Russia and that sort of thing. And Clare herself is so human. Isn't she beautiful — in an unusual way!"

"But why wouldn't Mrs. Farwell be human?" Lewis laughed. "Do you imply that she is above or below the norm? As to being beautiful — Petra is *really* beautiful."

"Petra — really beautiful? Yes, I suppose she is. But her features are too classical to be interesting, don't you think? And she's so impassive. She's too big too. She'll be positively statuesque some day. That type always develop into Junos. Clare is frightfully sweet to her. Frightfully patient. And what a background she's providing her with! All it needs is just a little playing up to! If she only knew how!"

"What do you mean, background?" Lewis asked curiously. And he wondered, what had Petra ever done to Cynthia to bring out such malice. Malice was no more natural to Cynthia than to himself.

"What do you think I mean?" she exclaimed, a little impatiently. "The people she is meeting, of course. Yourself to-day, for instance. How many times have you gone anywhere socially during the last year, Lewis? Yet

you went to the Farwells'. And you say you want to go again, often. But it's not only celebrities. Socially, too, Clare is giving Petra everything. This dinner dance to-night. Dick says there isn't a man invited who isn't the last word in eligibility. Why, Clare is providing Petra opportunities any ordinary girl would give her eyes for. And it's probably wasted. Men want more than mere passive beauty these days. Temperament, vivacity are what count. Clare doesn't realize it, of course, but the very contrast between herself and Petra puts them off Petra in spite of Clare's disadvantage in being married and thirty. It couldn't help to. Wait till little Sophia grows up, though. Then Clare will have her innings as a mother. The little thing sparkles already! Personality is a queer thing, isn't it?"

"I've sometimes almost thought so," Lewis agreed dryly. Then he asked, "Can you tell me, Cynthia, why Dick, who is adult, after a fashion — anyway, he isn't a mere callow college boy — and seems practically to live at Green Doors, hasn't fallen in love with Petra? And she with him? It's a miracle."

Lewis meant his question earnestly. For hours now, in his heart, he had been religiously grateful for the miracle mentioned.

"Are you serious?" Cynthia asked. "Couldn't you see for yourself — this afternoon? Let's sit down. No — I don't want a chair. You take it. I'll perch here on the rail. Yes, do smoke. What an absolutely precious cigarette case you've got there! My dear, let me take it! How

delicious! Just feeling it in your hand is thrilling! A present?"

Lewis nodded, but absently. Cynthia, as Dick had done, refrained from commenting on the probable value of the gift. If Lewis realized the value, he would only be made uncomfortable by it.

"You want to know why Dick doesn't fall in love with Petra Farwell? It's too obvious. How could a person like Dick look twice at that gauche girl, with Clare all the while in the same picture? Besides, Dick, more than most moderns, is a romantic. It sticks out all over him. He's an incorrigible idealist. But I'm not worried for Dick. He won't get his heart broken. Clare is too big to let that happen. It's really the most civilizing thing that could happen to him to be in love with a woman like Clare at precisely this stage in his development. Think of the color, the sheer beauty, the *depth* that knowing Clare so well—even thinking he is breaking his heart over her—is giving to Dick's life! As for falling in love with a girl like Petra—why, he isn't aware of her, except, perhaps, as one of Clare's problems. Dick hasn't said anything to us—Harry and me—of Petra's being a problem at Green Doors. Clare herself is too selfless and big in every way ever to let on, of course. But anybody can see! Clare's being so extraordinarily sweet and patient only makes it stand out all the more, how much a problem Petra is. Couldn't you see it yourself, this afternoon, Lewis? Where's your psychology?"

"Where is your own, Cynthia, my dear?" Lewis' voice was oddly constrained, Cynthia thought, wondering at it. "Why don't you look at Petra for yourself? It's obvious you never have. You've supinely accepted Clare's version of her, without using your own intelligence."

"Clare's version of Petra! But haven't I just been saying that Clare is absolutely loyal to Petra? She defends her, every time. She even goes so far as to call her sullen silences 'reticence.' And her vanity—Petra's obsessed over clothes, thinks of nothing else—Clare merely treats that as touchingly young and naïve. Or else she pretends that it's evidence of artistic appreciation and taste. But if that's what it is, why doesn't it show itself in other directions, now and then? I've never seen it. Why, the other day I mentioned something in her father's last novel, and Petra had to admit she hadn't even read it! Imagine! No, whatever Clare pretends to herself and the rest of us about it, Petra is just plain dull. . . . One is sorry for Clare, of course . . ."

Lewis was keeping only a tenuous hold on his good temper. "How can you be so dull yourself?" he asked. "She—Petra—is as far from dull as any human being I've ever had the honor to know. I suppose you've seen her nowhere but against the general unreality of Green Doors. That's the 'background' your Clare has given the child. . . . Petra's truth, against her background's untruth, has bewildered you. It hasn't me. . . ." He lighted a fresh cigarette.

Cynthia flapped her arms and burst into as good an

imitation of a rooster crowing as is possible to the human species. It was an accomplishment retained from childhood. In those early days it had been, usually, the closing note in some argument between brother and sister, where Cynthia had been proven the winner; and now, if ever, she knew herself right.

"You lose! I win!" she laughed, dropping her wings. "What good does it do you to be a psychiatrist? And a famous one? Petra and truth! That girl would as soon tell an out-and-out lie as wink. Clare never knows where she is with her when it's a question of fact."

"Oh, so Clare *has* admitted that much — not excused it?"

"Not a bit of it. You haven't caught *me*, darling, in a fib. Clare couldn't excuse it or cover it up. It's too obvious. Petra is always avoiding the truth."

"Yes. I got a hint of that myself this afternoon. Couldn't help it."

But now that so suddenly and even surprisingly Lewis had acknowledged her victorious in the scrimmage, Cynthia felt a little remorseful. Not on Lewis' account — he could afford his losses — on Petra's.

"I needn't have been so malicious!" she owned. "Come to think of it, I suppose Petra Farwell's never had one atom of religious training. What is there to make her feel an obligation to be truthful — or even grateful, for the matter of that? She's never had a chance to see life lived beautifully — till now."

"But who of us has had religious training?" Lewis

asked, surprised. "You haven't. I certainly haven't. Your own children haven't. What's that got to do with your judgments on Petra, then?"

"Oh, don't be so logical, darling. I was only making excuses for her, I suppose. But we are different, you must admit. Lying doesn't come natural to us, does it! And we are sincere. . . ."

"Doesn't it? Are we? Well — possibly. But then we are at peace with our environment. Not in danger from it. Our best policy is sincerity, telling the truth. If we were living in a jungle, my dear, an unfriendly and mysterious jungle, where we couldn't tell the trees from the shadows, you know, we'd fall back on protective coloring and other hypocrisies, lies, wouldn't we? That's where Petra's living. In a jungle. Where she can't tell the shadows from the trees, if you want to know. . . ."

"You're being fantastic on purpose. Or else you're overworking and not responsible!" Cynthia accused and then, suddenly, stopped breathing. How had they ever got to talking like this, so earnestly, about Petra Farwell? Lewis, anyway, who never talked personalities! What had happened to him? Why was he looking so strained and different? Was Lewis really interested in Petra Farwell for herself — in some particular way?

For years Cynthia had wanted Lewis to marry. Her husband agreed with her that, unmarried, the world was losing much that her famous brother could give it. He was terribly sweet with children. Her own four adored him. And some of his best and most famous work had

been done with children. Besides, he was — although Cynthia herself, being only his sister, could not quite see why — extraordinarily magnetic to women. They pursued him shamelessly. Avoiding that pursuit, both in his work and socially, had developed into something approximating an art in his contacts, Cynthia imagined. So he had a world to choose from. If only he had met Clare before Lowell Farwell met her! Cynthia had sighed this sigh to herself before to-night. Clare would have been perfect. But there were others. There must be. Lewis needn't fall back on a Petra — a sullen, stodgy young beauty, who wasn't even enough of a personality herself to appreciate personality in another, in Clare. If Lewis should be hypnotized by mere beauty and youth, and do anything so stupid, — how simply ironic that would be!

Catching back her breath, Cynthia descended precipitately from her perch on the piazza rail. She wanted to be nearer Lewis. Physical nearness might help their sympathetic nearness, which had been — she knew now — scattered to the four winds when she flapped rooster wings and crowed a minute ago. Besides, she had an inspiration. She drew a chair close to his. The arms of the two chairs touched.

"Lewis!" she said. "Do you remember that strange book, 'Phantastes,' by George MacDonald? We read it together the summer after Father died. No, it was the summer before. Aunt Cynthia read it to us. Those weeks we stayed with her. That was the summer *before* Father died, wasn't it? Anyway, we were really too young for

that book. But we got something out of it. I remember parts quite vividly, every now and then. . . . Particularly that gruesome bit about the Maid of the Alder. Remember that? How she was so perfectly beautiful to look at? Anodos thought so, anyway. And he went with her that long walk through the forest and spent the night with her in her cave? He thought she was the Lady of the Marble — or was it Alabaster? — whom he had sung to life and who had fled from him. He had never clearly seen her face but she was his ideal woman, the woman his soul was seeking. Now he thought he was to possess her at last. . . . But when morning came and he woke, his companion of the night had waked ahead of him and was at the door of the cave, standing there, looking out. Her back was turned to him . . . Remember? . . . She had had her desire of Anodos and she simply didn't care now if he discovered that she was not his ideal woman? She was perfectly careless that he should see how she was hollow! Do you remember her standing there, in the cave door, looking out into the forest — her hollow, rotten back, like the stump of a decayed tree? Like a coffin stood upon end? Wasn't it gruesome just!"

Cynthia was genuinely shuddering by this time. Lewis laughed. "I should say I do remember. That morning-after scene darkened my boyhood," he chuckled. "I've read 'Phantastes' through several times since that summer. I keep it by me. I can't imagine — can you? — why Aunt Cynthia chose that particular book for youngsters like us? I suppose because of its fairy element — the en-

chanted forest, and all. To my mind, it's one of the world's deepest, wisest, but almost too obscurely mystical books. Do *you* remember, Cynthia, how one begins to feel the horror threatening Anodos' soul's life, early, in the very beginning of this Maid of the Alder business, when he starts off with her on the walk to the cave? Your first twinges of horror and dread for Anodos set in when she takes such precautions to keep her face always squarely toward him, walking backwards to accomplish it, when necessary! Then, when they at last reach the cave, she makes him go in *ahead* of her. Inside, she always keeps her back to the wall. How horrible it is when the lamp shines through her! Anodos should have guessed then that she was hollow! . . . It is a nightmare. . . ."

"But Lewis! I meant — I'm afraid I meant — that Petra Farwell, young girl though she is, has several times made me remember the Maid of the Alder. I haven't just made it up now. Truly. I thought of it the last time I was at Green Doors. We were there for dinner. . . ."

"Petra — the Maid of the Alder! You're a little mad! But it's rather a curious coincidence that I myself have been brooding on 'Phantastes' very lately, this afternoon, in fact, at Green Doors and apropos of Petra too. Fact! Do you remember Anodos' song to his ideal woman — the genuine one, not the imitation — through her shrouding marble? It says how the world's sculptors in their search for her have succeeded in embodying in their

creations no more than their ideas of what she may be. They've never taken hold of her living self. I even remember some lines. Bless me if I don't!

"Round their visions, form enduring,
Marble vestments thou hast thrown;
But thyself, in silence winding,
Thou has kept eternally;
Thee they found not, many finding —
I have found thee: wake for me."

Lewis murmuring poetry in the dusk! And with the little curly smile that with him, paradoxically, meant utterest sincerity in what he was saying, even solemnity! Cynthia's heart beat slowly and with a kind of awe at the simplicity of the way in which Lewis' curly smile and his poetry had shut her up, permanently, on the subject of Petra. The whole situation — trivial and really nothing at all to Cynthia until only a minute ago — had between a breath and a breath been lifted to the dignity of a position on the knees of the gods, where she must perforce leave it to its own developments in that realm of pure fatality. And she thought they had been talking lightly!

But now her brother was asking — casual again, thank goodness — "Have the kids gone up to bed yet? I'm terribly afraid I promised 'em a yarn after they were packed away and that model starched nurse you inflict on 'em was well out of the picture. They'll be looking for me."



Chapter Seven

LEWIS WAS PLEDGED TO RETURN TO GREEN DOORS AT TEN o'clock that evening. Cynthia and Harry, Clare was aware, had made plans which would keep their cherished guest occupied for all of Sunday, and he could not come then. This was the only time left. She had made the rendezvous under cover of walking up to the house with Lewis when he was leaving Green Doors this afternoon. He was to let himself in by the wicket gate and she would meet him on the terrace, for Petra was not to know that he had come back. Dick had explained her scheme to him, had he not?

Yes, Dick had explained, and while at the time of the explanation Lewis had had no intention of collaborating with Mrs. Farwell in any schemes whatever, now he agreed to return for a "talk." Anything that touched Petra's existence would have drawn him irresistibly back.

The great hall was wide open onto the terrace tonight, as it had been this afternoon. It made an excellent ballroom. It was a small party and every one was inside,

dancing. At least, as Lewis came up onto it, the terrace seemed deserted.

His eyes found Petra first of all. She was dancing with a tall, dark youth, over a restricted area in the center of the floor. Lewis saw that the other girls were like flowers in the black-coated arms of their partners — scarlet flowers, blue, yellow, exotically scented. Or was the perfume from the flowers on the terrace? In any case, it harmonized with the exotic music. But the girls themselves seemed too fragile for the voluptuous implications of the perfume and the music. They were flowers drifting on the dark current of sensuousness with petals not yet sodden.

Lewis was amused at himself over his fancifulness but it continued to spin itself along. If the girls there were flowers, the boys were leaves. And the leaves, no more than the flowers, belonged to the dark current under the music; they were merely eddying over its surface, vacant and bemused. It was strangely unreal, unconvincing — both the would-be savage music and the would-be voluptuous dancing.

But Petra was different. His eyes came back to her. She was not bemused and she was too alive to drift. So her dancing was out of key and came near to awkwardness. Given solid earth, she could run fleetly, beautifully, Lewis was certain, — a Diana, spirit and body one. But she was too alive and too vital to find herself in this syncopated dalliance with a shadow world of sensuousness. Passion, for her to recognize it, must be bright,

whole, burning with sun. Lewis was not amused now at his thought. He knew what he knew about Petra, and his heart offered up a gratitude that was religious in the knowing.

Clare stole up and stood beside him. She had been watching for his arrival, sitting with Dick in the shadow of a tall flower-grown urn. She had sent the young man back to the party peremptorily and with some excitement the instant the older and more eminent visitor appeared.

"Aren't they precious!" she exclaimed, her fingers just touching Lewis' arm. "All of them! But my Petra in particular? In that frosty gown! — Come to the library. We can't talk against this racket. Lowell's in town speaking to a meeting of the Boston Authors' Club, otherwise he would be hiding in the library himself. He detests jazz. Except when your brother-in-law plays it. Harry's jazz is superb. He makes it art!"

The library was a surprisingly small room but its walls rose through two stories with books all the way up to the high ceiling. A mild, yellow and diffused light, radiating from unseen sources, would make reading here — even at the top of the book ladder — as easy for the eyes as if it were broad day.

Clare settled herself in a corner of the very low, built-in modern divan which extended down one entire length of the room, and Lewis, obedient to her gesture, sat down, experimentally, beside her. He had had little practice with modernistic furniture such as this, which, he was learning now, demanded a new technique in

posture, unless one were built on angular lines and accustomed to lolling. It would quite suit Farwell, for instance, whose divan it was. But Lewis, who was stocky rather than angular, found himself having to bend in all the wrong places to adapt himself to it. Mrs. Farwell, however, was perfectly at home. She had drawn her feet up under her, Japanese fashion, and sat now perched on her heels, wand-straight, small and exquisite. But then, she was as supple-bodied as a child and as poised as a dancer in every attitude that she assumed.

"I am really delighted," she was saying, "that you have come, like this. If I had gone into town some day, instead, and seen you in your office, everything would have been so different. I should have had to *tell* you about things. We may have saved weeks, don't you think so, Doctor Pryne, in getting you here where you can see it all for yourself and needn't draw it out bit by bit with questions?"

Clare's evening gown was flame-colored taffeta, her jewels pearls, her feet — out of sight but remembered — were sandal-shod with gold heels, curved like dagger blades. It was an elegance in striking contrast to the simplicity and seeming carelessness of her afternoon's appearance. But Lewis felt no contrast. It was all of the same piece: all part of the game. And when he looked away from her, which he did rather quickly in very shame for the ungenerosity of every thought he seemed able to think concerning Petra's stepmother, it was only to find her voice increasing his prejudice. No matter

what ideas her words in themselves conveyed, certain inflections in the tones seemed to be asking over and over, "What do you think of me, what do you think of me, *what do you think of me?*" It was the eager and unappeasable cry of an insatiate vanity. Lewis hated himself for hearing it so plainly; but his nerves were taut. When had Doctor Pryne allowed himself the excuse of nerves before! Yet to be so near Petra and shut away in here with Mrs. Farwell!

He wound his arms around his knees. That was it. That was what you had to do to come to terms with this fantastic divan. Stick your knees up, almost to your chin, and then not to be altogether too orang-utan-like, wind your arms. The only alternative would be to sit on your feet, as his hostess was doing.

"There wouldn't have been any need for you to come to my office," he said. "Not to talk about Petra. She is the last person in the world, to my mind, to need psychiatric treatment." He might as well get this part over quickly, Lewis felt.

Clare was surprised by the dry conviction with which Lewis spoke, but she was not warned. She swayed toward him, from her heels, and put her hand on his arm. The gesture was as unselfconscious, and un-sex-conscious, as if she were a child of ten. Lewis was aware of her unconsciousness all the time that her fingers stayed there, pressing into his coat sleeve, and her soft warm breath was almost on his cheek. He wondered whether she pawed Dick like this, with casual unselfconsciousness, —

and whether Dick found it engagingly innocent. Dick was just the sort of romantic youth — Lewis hadn't needed Cynthia to explain Dick to him — to confuse sexual paucity with purity.

"Oh, but you don't understand what we meant then, Richard and I," she protested. "Psychiatry — anyway as you practise it, Doctor Pryne — is not for diseased minds merely. Petra is terribly sane. Saner than I am, I'm certain of that. It is something less tangible I am asking your help with. I want you to make it possible for my stepdaughter to be true to herself and to be happy. — That wasn't Petra's true self you saw this afternoon. I know, Doctor, that it is your faith, as much as it is mine, that most people want to find themselves and be true to themselves, to their best selves, I mean, if only they can be shown how. If you *hadn't* that faith in human nature, then you couldn't do for people what you do. You see I know something about your work. Mrs. Dickerman is one of my intimate friends. Cornelia James too. I've known Cornie ever since we were at Miss Foster's School together. So I know, for I have seen, how you took at least one woman and made her into a charming, agreeable person when she was over thirty. Why, Cornie was the most morbid, oversensitive and unhappy soul until you began treating her! — And even if I hadn't seen these miracles, I'd still know from reading your books what you can do for people in the way of orientating them with their own highest potentialities. And all I am asking, Doctor Pryne, is that you should do that for my

Petra. You do believe, don't you, that it isn't natural to her — can't be natural to any one — to be so secretive and indifferent as she seems? Not at nineteen, anyway! And with Lowell Farwell for a father — and I so devoted to her!" — Clare's fingers had relaxed their steady pressure but she was slow to remove them from Lewis's coat sleeve.

Lewis might have laughed. He frowned to save himself from doing so; for it would not have been a pleasant laugh and the frown was, at least, silent. Clare was not the first blasphemous wealthy woman who had tried, casually and even patronizingly, to buy his services as a cure of souls for themselves or members of their family. But in this instance it was Petra's reserve — that clean, sword-edged reserve — he was being asked to violate. Yes, this woman was looking forward to his pulling Petra all apart, like the works of a clock, and laying the pieces on the table, for them to mull over together.

He could hear Mrs. Lowell Farwell expatiating on it to her next dinner partner. Yet, no. She would hardly do that. It would be worth saving until the conversation was general. "Oh, yes. Doctor Pryne is psychoanalyzing my stepdaughter. He is frightfully interested in her case. It is too wonderful what he has done for her already. She's a different person. Oh, but you must know who he is! Doctor Lewis Pryne! He wrote 'Learning to be Adult.'"

Oh, yes! Mrs. Farwell would exploit it for all it was

worth at dinners, luncheons, teas and in the arms of dancing partners for weeks to come, while all the time the inflections in her voice demanded, "What do you think of me, what do you think of me, what do you think of *me now?*"

Only, of course she would not — because she could not. Fortunately she had come to the wrong counter. Lewis had nothing to sell her — but, on second thoughts, something, possibly, that he would give her for nothing; for it had suddenly occurred to him that if he failed her entirely to-night, she might try elsewhere. There *were* psychoanalysts quite the sort she imagined him to be, of course. Would Petra, with Mrs. Farwell setting her heart on it, have the hardihood to stand out against going through the fashionable paces of being psychoanalyzed? He must do what he could, to avoid such a possible calamity.

"This question of finding one's self," he murmured, — "it's living one's life, isn't it, that accomplishes that, in the end? Petra is too young to have found herself in that sense, of course. But she is old enough, on the other hand, to want to. That may be the conflict, the cause of all her 'indifference' to you and her life here. She said something to me this afternoon about wanting to go to business school and be independent. Wouldn't her father send her? That would be cheaper, anyway, and infinitely more sensible than having her psychoanalyzed. She could get quite away from Green Doors. Live in the

Girls' Studio Club — or perhaps even set up an apartment with some girl friend. . . ." He was, of course, thinking of Teresa.

It had the effect, anyway, of removing Mrs. Farwell's hand from his arm. She was back in her corner, looking at him with surprise and even doubt.

"Petra didn't tell you that she wanted to get away from Green Doors and all I am doing for her here? Did she? Petra didn't actually say — this afternoon, the minute you were alone with her — that she was unhappy? Did she? I simply don't understand, Doctor Pryne!"

"But why are you surprised?" Lewis evaded. "I gathered from young Wilder when he came to my office on Thursday that that was how things were with Petra. You felt she was abnormally indifferent to you, he said, and to all the nice things you were trying to do for her and to give her. But, do you know, now I've seen Petra, that indifference seems perfectly healthy to me? She is, after all, not a child. She's a woman. *Let* her learn a profession and be independent! Why not?"

Mrs. Farwell was growing wider and wider eyed. Then suddenly Lewis knew what he should have guessed: Clare had never really believed that Petra was antagonistic to her. She had thought her indifference and reticence merely temperamental idiosyncrasies. In fact, she had in all sincerity thought Petra what she had made Cynthia think her, a girl deficient in sensibility. So she was only tampering with Petra's temperament, or rather, asking Lewis to tamper with it, for the sake of drawing

him — Doctor Lewis Pryne — into the Farwells' "interesting" circle. Modern morbid psychology was much in the air these days. Being psychoanalyzed by "well-known" doctors had become a fashionable pastime. Having one's stepdaughter, to whom one was in every way so marvelously generous, psychoanalyzed, and then oneself discussing the case in the wings, as it were, with the famous psychiatrist *ad infinitum*, would be a new way to play the game.

A strained laugh from Clare interrupted Lewis' bitter train of thought. "I am afraid Petra has been deceiving you, rather," she exclaimed. "What I *can't* understand is how she managed it, and in so short a time, with you, who are so — so wise. She must have deliberately set out to engage your sympathies the minute I left her alone with you. But why? And as for a girl like Petra living at the Studio Club — after Green Doors — can you imagine it, really? Don't tell me *she* suggested that!"

"Perhaps not," Lewis answered. "As a matter of fact, she would be more restricted in her freedom there than here, I suppose. But with a friend, then — in an apartment —"

Again the laugh. "You don't know Petra, Doctor Pryne! She hasn't an intimate friend to her name. I invite girls here, of course, all the time. They come, enjoy themselves with each other and the boys, and invite Petra to their homes in return. But as for friends, she simply doesn't make them. She hasn't the gift of

friendship. It's one of my worries about her, — one of the things I thought your analysis of her might cure!"

"But there's Teresa. That's one friend, at least, Teresa —" Too late Lewis knew himself a traitor to Petra's confidences, and broke off, embarrassed and sorry. But to his great relief, Clare seemed not to have even heard. She was repeating, but almost as if for her own ears, and very softly, "I don't understand. Petra took you to the guest house to show you the river view. That is all the time you two were together. And in that short while Petra conveyed to you that she was unhappy here and wanted to get away. Why, it's unbelievable! How could even Petra be quite so — so outrageous as that!"

"But mightn't Petra think it a little outrageous of us, of you and me, to be discussing her here now, as we are doing?" Lewis inquired reasonably. "Why shouldn't *she* be wounded — and angry? I don't see any difference, really. . . ."

Shock dried the tears, just gathered, from the widened eyes which were turned on him. If Clare had taken anything for granted, as certain to result from to-day's anticipated contact with this supposedly brilliant psychiatrist, it was that he would be deeply impressed by her beautiful disinterested kindness toward this girl who had no natural claim on her whatever. But from the very first minute, so Clare began to think now, Doctor Pryne had missed everything of what should have been obvious to him. He had no subtlety then! But if this were true,

why was everybody so mad about him and how could he be a successful doctor of souls! That was what Lowell called him, and he was even talking of putting him into his next novel, — disguised, of course. And then the miracles he worked! You simply had to have penetration of some sort, understanding of some sort, to do for personalities what he had done for Julia Dickerman, Cornie and all the rest! But even without any extraordinary amount of penetration you would expect him to see that it was both disloyal and cheap for Petra to have confided in him as she must have done this afternoon, the very minute they were alone together.

Suddenly Clare gave up the idea of being hurt by Petra's astounding disloyalty. She would be too generous, too big to think of herself in the situation at all. But she understood now that she would have to *say* to this man whatever it was she wanted him to know. No use trusting to his discerning anything! That was what Petra had done, apparently. Said things. Simply because Petra had said things, Doctor Pryne had believed them — and that in spite of all that he should have seen and all that Clare had meant him to see for himself! Well, she — Clare — would have to descend to Petra's crude methods. She would explain herself to this exasperating person in words and expound her relations with Petra. But she would leave the malice to Petra. The very contrast between her generosity and Petra's smallness ought to speak for itself. He simply could not be so obtuse as to miss that much — or could he?

She refrained from touching him, although her impulse had again been to put her fingers on his arm. Instinctively she had a minute ago come to feel that physical contact made this particular man uncomfortable. But the urgency of Clare's fingers' pressure was transferred to her voice when she said:

"I am afraid that you have begun by misunderstanding almost everything, Doctor Pryne. But it doesn't matter. I mean, it doesn't matter that you consider Petra justified in her attitude toward me and what I am trying to do for her, as you seem to. What does matter — all that I care about at all — is Petra's good. It is for her own sake I want her to become adjusted and happy, an integrated personality. It is not for my sake. Not even for her father's. And if you are right and I ought to give her up, let her go away, — why, then I hope I am unselfish enough to let her try it. But why business school — of all things, for a daughter of Lowell Farwell's? It will be interesting to know."

But she gave Lewis no chance to answer that. She hurried on:

"First you must tell me everything she said to you. I don't mean what she may have said about Green Doors, her home here, or me. No, I am afraid hearing that would hurt too much. But what she wanted different. Let us just concentrate on the positive side of things and let the negative go. . . . You see, even if you won't take her as a patient, in the way I hoped you would take her, I still need your advice, your wisdom, Doctor. For

in those brief moments you were alone with my step-daughter, you seem to have come nearer to understanding her than I have in the years of our close association. You made her articulate for once. That in itself is something. Petra, articulate!"

She paused there, but only to draw Lewis' glance to her face. "You see, my husband can't help me with Petra." Her eyes probed in the shallows of Lewis' cold, sleepy gaze. "He is out of it, even if she is his own daughter. There is almost nothing of sympathy between them. That is what I have been working for, ever since my marriage, to help them to a more happy relationship. I have dreamed that Lowell might come to love the daughter of his youth as he loves our little Sophia. He adores the baby. But that, I am afraid, is merely because she is mine, and her very existence makes *me* more his. That is the way it is in happy marriages, of course. Father-love is all bound up in the father's love for the mother. But Lowell, you see, loved Petra's mother (if you can call it love) — well, differently — and that is why Petra herself — I have figured it out — means so little to him. . . ."

Again Clare kept her fingers from Lewis' coat sleeve but she actually clutched her hands on her lap to accomplish it. And she swayed toward him, her eyes insisting on holding his cold gaze. Her whole vivid, quick-silver face was alive with her intention to make Lewis her ally, to win from him something at last, of what she had intended to win when she invited him back to-night.

"Do you mind my telling you intimate things like this?" she asked naïvely. "I had meant to tell them and had everything — all the information you could need — organized, you see. Even now, when you say that Petra doesn't need psychoanalyzing, I still rather want to tell you. Before you are sure you are right about the wisdom of Petra's leaving her father and me, giving up her life here with all its advantages, you ought to know a little more about the child herself, don't you think? I see now—you have let me see—that my Petra herself, as a person, interests you, quite aside from your psychiatry. And I am grasping at that interest as at a straw, Doctor. I am so alone in my concern for this child and in my dreams for her! I'm not mistaken? You *are* interested, aren't you?" This time at last the lady required an answer — waited for it.

"Yes, I am very much interested," Lewis admitted, after a mere instant's hesitation. But all the same he looked toward the door. If only Petra herself would appear there! Come in, in her frosty gown! Interrupt this really silly performance. He did not need any one to explain Petra to him. It was her presence he wanted. One meeting of their eyes had told him more than all the volumes Mrs. Lowell Farwell could say with that overtone in her voice which insisted on bending his understanding to her own interpretations of Petra — or more subtly yet, what she meant him to think were her interpretations. Really he could not doubt that Clare must know, as simply as he knew, that Petra did not need

either of them; the integration of her young self was a perfected accomplishment and all the more perfected for having the seal of her reticence upon it.

Suddenly now Lewis knew why the blue gentians, there in the Cambridge apartment where first he saw Petra, had stayed so sharply etched on his memory. Petra herself was like a blue gentian, — a secret, brave flower springing from an arid soil. Lewis remembered "The Wind Boy," a story he had bought lately for his nephews and read through before giving them. The little girl in that story was named Gentian, and her brother explained it: "Father always said that one small gentian had all the sky folded around in its soft fringes. Gentian magic. Cold and frost don't scare it, for it has the whole sky held close to give it company and heart. . . ." Well, that was true of Petra, just as it was true of the little girl in the fairy tale. But what made it true, how Petra had appropriated the blue sky and held its secrets as her own, where she had lain hold of it, — that Lewis could not guess.

Clare at this moment was vastly encouraged by the light which played — palpably — over the doctor's lips and almost rose in his cold sleepy eyes. This was approaching the way she had imagined things would go between them when they really got to talking intimately, and he began to see her in the way she intended he should see her. Before she was through with telling him about Petra to-night — the excuse for the tête-à-tête — this light of appreciation and admiration for herself

would have become established unequivocally in the cold sleepy eyes. She had not a moment's doubt of it. Nothing in past experience had instilled trepidation or the imagination of the possibility of failure into this sex-unconscious flirt whose line (she acknowledged it to herself and was quite simply proud of it) was spiritual *rapport* with interesting male personalities in the higher areas of contact. If passion developed in the course of these spiritual contacts, it was merely a sign, on a slightly lower plane, that all had gone well in the upper airs. It was a sign, in fact, that Clare's vanity, though not her senses, ultimately demanded.

Her eyes fell from Lewis' cold eyes to his mouth. She thought cleverly (she was far from stupid): "It's a face of frozen passion. Not cold. It is all there. But frozen by asceticism."

She was suddenly, hardly understanding why herself, extraordinarily excited.



Chapter Eight

LEWIS CONTINUED TO SEE A BLUE GENTIAN ETCHED ON air, all the while Clare told him about Petra. But he heard her, well enough, in spite of the vision he was contemplating, and outwardly he was attentive.

"Lowell was frightfully young when he married Petra's mother. And the attraction between them — it's almost inevitable in early marriages like that, I suppose — was merely physical. So, when he waked up to that, it wasn't nearly enough, not for a person like Lowell Farwell, anyway. But the only reason one need even remember that early tragedy is the way it still affects Petra. Her father got the idea, almost from the day she was born, that she was her mother over again. She was physically like her, in the first place. They say that Ann was a great beauty. Lowell says she was even more beautiful than Petra. But it wasn't the physical resemblance that repelled Lowell most and still hurts. It was her mind and temperament. He got the idea that Petra had a commonplace mind, ordinary. Like her mother. And now, nineteen years after, she is still for him an echo —

a reverberation — of an old disappointment. It seems cruel, I know. But he can't help himself, and one can understand, don't you think?

"I understand, anyway. And it is appalling to think that if Petra's mother hadn't happened to die, Lowell might still be bound to her. She was puritanical or fundamentalist or something. Whatever the particular cult was, it was stupid and narrow and forbade divorce. She thought herself religious! Imagine calling such cruelty religion! But Providence had mercy, if she didn't. She didn't believe in birth control any more than she did in divorce, and she died when the second child was born, when Petra was only one year old. That, if anything, gives you the picture of how impossible Petra's mother made things for her young, penniless, genius-husband — having another child right away. But the new baby was premature and fortunately lived only a little while.

"Lowell was through with marriage, he thought then, for all time. His religious wife had seared his faith in the sweetness of it as a human relation. But though seared, his faith was not actually destroyed. It has never been destroyed. Lowell Farwell has been bigger than the things life has done to him. Six or seven years later he saw Elsa Larsen in 'Romeo and Juliet' at Munich. Elsa Larsen's acting was beautiful enough to break your heart. When she stuck to Shakespeare, anyway. She was really a great actress, even if this country never woke up to her. Did you ever see her? I saw her first in Munich, when I was a young girl. I spent the year I was

twelve abroad with my mother. We went to the National Theater dozens of times to see Elsa Larsen in her Shakespeare roles. I never dreamed then that I should marry her husband one day! I may even have seen him, without knowing or remembering, in the theater. They were married inside of a week after they met. It was a perfectly wild marriage, of course. The result of utter loneliness on his part, mad infatuation on hers.

"Larsen killed herself. Yes, I know it isn't known. And it *is* shocking. But she did it. She ran the car into those park gates on purpose. She meant to kill Lowell at the same time. He was begging her to get a divorce from him or let him get it, and she simply lost her head and drove straight into the gates. She saw that they were closed in plenty of time to have swerved. Lowell is certain of it.

"But what I want you to see and think about, Doctor, is Petra, of course. They put her in boarding school and she stayed there vacations and all, the few years till the so-called accident. But when poor Marian made Lowell think he had compromised her — yes, every one except Lowell himself, it seems, pretty well understood that little drama Marian staged at the Tillotsons' house party — well, when Marian became Petra's second stepmother, there wasn't enough money to keep the child on at boarding school. Larsen spent all she earned and left nothing. They lived huddled up in that dreary little apartment in Cambridge with only one servant to do the work. How Marian hated it! She never lifted her hand for Petra

or gave her a thought, except to resent her being there at all, one could see. But the thing Marian has really to blame herself for, to my mind, is the way she left the child to the sole companionship of whatever general-housework girl happened to be in possession of the place at the time. I myself was so appalled at seeing what Petra's life was like when I met them, that even if I hadn't fallen head over heels in love with Lowell I should have married him, almost, to rescue his daughter. All that was maternal in me was roused and fighting. That day I met you there — remember? — my heart was broken for Petra. . . .

"So now you can see why I can't blame Petra for any seeming disloyalty she may have displayed this afternoon in the talk you had with her. She has never known what it was to be loved before. How should she be counted on to return it, or even to be loyal to it? It is asking too much — even after three years, I think. But you see why I am grateful for your interest in her, and why I am ready, almost without questioning it, to act on any advice you care to give — now that you know the child's miserable history."

As she had been talking, Clare's eyes had now and then been starry with tears, and on the final words one or two actually fell. She wiped them away, quite simply, with a handkerchief. She had no need to consider her make-up, as she never wore any.

Lewis withdrew his thought from a blue gentian, etched on air. He untied himself somehow and struggled

up from his low place at Clare's side. He asked if he might smoke. Clare had not remembered to offer him a cigarette because she herself did not smoke any more than she used make-up; but at once she was all charming apologies for her neglect and motioned him toward the supply near at hand. But Lewis, apologetic himself, preferred his own variety. He got out his case, lit a Lucky, took a deep inhalation, — and laughed.

Clare did not understand the laugh, considering all she had been saying to him — and her tears. But she waited. She had done what she could to make herself clear to him and it was his turn now. He must have some reaction other than that ambiguous laugh to all that she had said — and *looked* — during the past minutes.

He was pacing back and forth before the long divan, his hands deep in the already sagging pockets of his tweed jacket. They did not dress for dinner at the Allens, and Lewis was in Meadowbrook without his dress clothes. But when after a few seconds of this rather surprising behavior, the man whirled and stood before her, looking down at her, his face, at last, was beginning to mirror something — she was almost certain — of what she was. Clare thought she saw her generosity reflected in Doctor Pryne's face as in a mirror. And on account of that true reflection of herself, she forgave him all the bewilderment and uncertainty he had for just a little while caused her. It was rather wonderful having his cold, sleepy eyes no longer cold and sleepy but aware of

her. She had known all along of course that Doctor Lewis Pryne was a person of rare power and magnetism, but until this instant she had missed the biting tang of actually feeling it. To her own surprise her heart beat fast. Madly!

"Are you serious?" he was asking. "Do you really want advice from me? For I know what I would do in your place and I would do it like a shot. Shall I say?"

She looked back up at him. Was this hypnotism? She felt excitedly supine — submissive — open to this man's will. . . .

Her eyes, grave — and she herself knew how lovely! — promised him she was ready to do whatever he said.

"Very well." — But how dry his voice sounded! And already he had stopped looking at her! — "First of all, I should cut off that absurd allowance. Two thousand a year, Petra said it was, and just for clothes! And then I should encourage her to take the job waiting for her in my office. It's a good job. It can begin on Monday morning at nine o'clock. And I wouldn't fuss any more about trying to create sympathy between father and daughter. It is too late. The time is past. Petra has had, I suppose, a pretty bad deal from the beginning, but from now on she ought to be her own environment maker. You can't possibly go on doing it for her. Have you ever heard the phrase: 'Environment is hidden identity'? I believe that that is perfectly true of any personality, given half a chance. It's time Petra had her chance. Marriage and a home where she herself is the protecting force — that's

the ultimate answer. But as a stop-gap right now, a job. That's what I think."

Clare had sent for Petra and they were waiting. Lewis wandered over to the massive, built-in library table. It was shaped like a scimitar. The last words in biography, essays, poetry and fiction of two continents seemed to be here under his hand, most of the volumes still in their bizarre paper jackets. In the midst of the bright jumble stood two large heavy silver frames holding photographs. One was Clare, the other Petra. Petra was in evening dress and her posture and expression must have been dictated by the photographer. The eyes in particular were self-conscious and static in their inexpressive trance. The mouth alone was sentient, not even the stare of the photographer and the camera, together having succeeded in betraying it into insincerity. Clare's photographed face, on the other hand, was vibrant, with just the hint of a candid smile dawning in eyes and lips. She was not in evening dress but had been taken in a simple blouse with a soft turnover collar. Of the two photographs, hers was much the more interesting and alluring. And so Lowell Farwell must think every time he noticed the two faces in juxtaposition here on his table.

"Just one of Clare's little touches," Lewis told himself, wincing. But now he was to get Petra away, out of it. That was exhilarating. He took Petra's photograph into his hands. He was studying it, and Clare from her corner of the divan was watching him curiously, when

Petra finally came in. Clare beckoned Petra to the deserted place beside her while Lewis replaced the photograph to the exact spot on the desk from which he had taken it, and sat down on the arm of a chair facing the divan and the two living, breathing women contrasted there. He lighted a fresh cigarette but did not offer Petra one, remembering her afternoon's embarrassment.

He began at once. "You know what you said this afternoon, Petra, about wanting to learn stenography and becoming ultimately somebody's private secretary? Well, I have a job for you that will begin paying right away, and you can practise shorthand and typewriting in your spare moments. It's in my office, assistant to my secretary. Miss Frazier is overworked. Has been for some time. It has been getting more and more on my conscience lately." This was perfectly true. "But with another girl in the reception office to receive the patients, answer the telephone, and take the preliminary records, I'll not worry. You can begin Monday morning."

Lewis' voice showed nothing of the elation he was feeling. His tone, in fact, was dry and his look constrained. But Petra, as well as he, had herself well in hand, it seemed. Reticence had leapt to her eyes with almost his first words — a sword on guard.

"Darling! What *is* the matter?" Clare demanded, but without much genuine surprise. She had never expected that Petra would be delighted by Doctor Pryne's offer of this job. She knew her stepdaughter's love of freedom and luxury too well, she thought. And when Petra

learned that her allowance was to be cut as well as her days filled with work, Clare imagined she would not even consider Doctor Pryne's astonishing proposition. Why, this very month Petra had borrowed ahead on her allowance, to pay for the frock she had worn this afternoon. She was always borrowing ahead. She spent more on her clothes than Clare spent on her own. Petra considered that her contribution to the world's work was making and keeping herself beautiful, and if she had deceived Doctor Pryne this afternoon into thinking her serious-minded and idealistic, he was now to be undeceived, Clare told herself almost gleefully. Watching it happen was like watching a play, immensely entertaining. But while Clare watched, she spoke.

"There's nothing to be frightened of," she told Petra. "Don't look like that. You don't have to do anything you don't want to, darling. It is only a suggestion Doctor Pryne is making. Have a cigarette?" She picked one out of a box on a table at her hand, put it into Petra's fingers, and finding an automatic lighter, held it for Petra.

Even in his bewilderment at the way Petra had received his offer, Lewis could appreciate what Clare was doing in insisting on that cigarette. Petra was a foil for herself. Physically and temperamentally, all Clare's effects were heightened by her contrast with her stepdaughter. And Clare, the artist tireless in procuring her own effects, took advantage of even so trivial a difference as smoking and not smoking. She had not remembered to offer Lewis a cigarette, but she was practically forcing

Petra to smoke. And Petra's docile compliance was only one of the ways in which she was of use to her stepmother and earned that fantastic two thousand dollars. . . .

But Petra's fingers holding the cigarette were shaking. The trembling began at her elbow, resting on her knee, but it was most visible in the fingers. She said, in a voice that gave the lie to her shaking fingers, "It is very nice of you to offer me a job, Doctor Pryne. How much is the salary?"

Clare had made a mistake in insisting on the cigarette! She should have presented Petra with a spear, not an English Oval, as an emblem of the girl's unyielding hardihood. The cigarette, moved to exquisite vibrations in her trembling fingers, merely robbed Petra's overt hardness of its authenticity. Oh, yes, Clare would do better to play up the Diana in the girl, not a sophistication which did not exist.

"Eighteen dollars a week," he said. "That is a small living wage, I know, but I am afraid it is all the job is really worth. And prices are down. Food, rooms, clothes, everything. They have tumbled. You ought to be able to manage on eighteen a week and get quite a lot of fun out of it, Petra."

In saying this so lightly he remembered, of course, the millions of unemployed throughout the country, and his heart smote him at his careless words. But he did not waver in his purpose. Petra's need of employment was different from theirs, it is true, but no less real. Her

situation, as much as theirs, was desperate. . . . But what was she saying!

"I don't have to worry about living on your eighteen a week, Doctor Pryne. I never could, you know. Just my dresses cost much more than that. Besides, Clare doesn't charge me board!"

"Petra darling! There is nothing in this offer to make you angry! Doctor Pryne got the idea from you yourself, this afternoon, that you wanted to leave Green Doors and be independent. That is why he thought of this job. He thought you were unhappy because you weren't independent and living a life of your own. Whatever did you say to make him think that?"

Petra hesitated. Any one looking at her that moment could actually see her deciding among a choice of answers to her stepmother. Lewis did look at her and see. But Clare could not wait for the fabrication, whatever it was to be. She went on: "But Doctor Pryne has convinced me of one thing, Petra. He has made me ashamed, not for you, for myself. Your two thousand dollars' allowance is absurd. With people hungry right in Boston. When you spend it only for clothes! It ought to be one thousand, darling. And the other thousand you can give, yourself, any way you like to do it, to charity."

Petra's cigarette was burning itself away in an ash-tray between herself and Clare. Its smoke ascended in thick violet ribbons. Lewis felt that she was thinking with lightning speed, — but unguessable thoughts. Clare

was as much in the dark as himself as to Petra's thoughts, he supposed; but he suspected that, unlike himself, she did not know her own ignorance. Against those ribbons of violet smoke Petra looked like a sibyl — enigmatical — young — divinely young.

"Do you mean that you are cutting my allowance in half? Now, like this, — without warning?" She spoke as if Lewis were not there, as if she and Clare were alone. Her voice was more astonished than it was angry.

"No. I wouldn't do that, Petra. You know I wouldn't. You can still have the second thousand for charity, to give any way you like. I will do the same myself. I had been thinking of it for myself as a matter of fact — even before my talk with Doctor Pryne about you to-night. I meant to go over my dress bills and, beginning next month, budget myself to half as much as I am accustomed to spend. Merely giving money outright, the way I have been doing, isn't enough. It is actual sacrifice that counts."

"But I don't want either to give or to sacrifice," Petra protested. "If the two thousand is mine, I shall spend it just as I have been spending it the last three years. Is it mine, or isn't it mine, Clare? That is what I asked you."

Clare's glance just flickered in Lewis' direction. But she did not want him to read the gratification in it and she put her hand to her cheek quickly, shading her eyes. She said, "Darling, unless you will look up some charity, get interested in it, and give the second thousand there, it can't be yours any more. Not now — when I have been

seeing things through Doctor Pryne's clear vision. But surely — "

Lewis wanted to stop the woman, wanted to undo all that he himself had so crudely brought about. But he might as well have tried to push back an oncoming steam roller as turn Clare from her honorable participation in this dramatic scene that he himself, no other, had staged. He felt this and held his peace, knowing all the while that he had blundered irreparably and made things worse for Petra than they already had been, in some mysterious way that he was not yet in a position to understand.

Petra had interrupted Clare. Her anger had now risen to the level of her astonishment. "It's absolutely unfair," she cried, her young face and her young voice ablaze with wrath. "It is a *salary* you are cutting, Clare Otis-Farwell! Not a mere allowance. Does Doctor Pryne know that? And you do it casually, like this, at his mere suggestion. I earn every penny of it."

"What in heaven's name do you mean?" For that instant Clare forgot Lewis as audience. Her expression was simply dumbfounded, with for once nothing subtle about it. "*You* earn two thousand dollars a year! Why, you don't even make your own bed!"

"But I do earn it, all the same. Every dollar of it. By being around all the while as evidence of your generosity and goodness! Everybody praises you for it! And you hope it will make my father keep on adoring you as he has never kept on adoring his other wives. I am

a perpetual reminder to him of how you differ from all the others. *You are maternal!* Haven't I let you play your part? Haven't I played mine? What have I done to spoil the picture? Surely you've thought it worth a miserable two thousand!"

Clare was on her feet, every tinge of color whipped by Petra's cruel, wild words from her unrouged face.

"Petra! Hush! Are you crazy?"

Petra, too, was up. And then Lewis noticed that he himself was standing! There was nothing he could say or do, however. He felt as if his own poisonous thoughts about Clare Farwell had been, through some fault of his own, broadcast through Petra's sibyllic lips. All the blame for the whiplash words, for the cruel scorn of them and their hatred, was his. Not Petra's. It was he, Lewis, who had thought them and now they were brashly vocal.

But now suddenly again Petra's voice was her own, and the words were her own, no sibyl's. "Oh, Clare!" she was faltering. "I am sorry. I am terribly sorry. I was crazy, yes. —" And then, looking at Lewis, in a different and utterly cold tone, she asked surprisingly, "How much does eighteen a week make it a year, Doctor Pryne? Eighteen times fifty-two, do you know?"

He told her, not showing his consternation. She said, "Well, that almost makes up the two thousand, then; if I live here at Green Doors and Clare pays me one thousand for part time. Am I to go on living here,

Clare? Or isn't that possible — after what I just said?"

Clare, who was not tall, looked tall at the moment. Consciousness of a chance to show magnanimity swayed her bodily as well as mentally, like a refreshing wind, where only a minute ago she had been stifling. "Of course you may go on living here. This is your home. Of course you haven't meant a word you said. You were a little hysterical. It was Doctor Pryne's idea, about your living in Boston, — not mine. He even suggested Teresa Kerr as a roommate! Imagine! But as long as you can tolerate me, Petra, no matter whether you can ever learn to trust me and love me or not, I want you *at home*. Call it half-time salary if you like. I shall certainly give you the one thousand."

But at mention of Teresa's name, Petra's anger was back, lashing this time toward Lewis. But only for a flash. It was over, as lightning is over; and it had struck through her glance. She answered Clare, turning her back on Lewis, "That *is* wonderful of you. I don't see how you can be so forgiving. I don't deserve it. But I want to tell you, Clare, that ever since I have been with you here at Green Doors, I have never once spoken a disloyal word about you — until this afternoon, to Doctor Pryne. And I never will again — not as long as I live here, and ever after, I hope. Can you ever trust me again? Do you believe me, Clare?"

Lewis turned away. He walked toward one of the French windows opening onto the terrace. But Petra's

voice followed him, made him turn again. She was asking in a polite voice, "Is your offer still open, Doctor Pryne? Shall I come to work on Monday?"

He came back; looked at her for a confused, almost blank moment; then said shortly, "Of course. If you really want to."

"Do you think I can learn? Will I really be any use to you? It isn't just your conscience giving me that other thousand, since it's through you I've lost it?"

"I am sure you will earn every cent of it. Miss Frazier needs an assistant badly. I told you that."

"Shall I take this job, Clare? Do you advise it? Do you believe what Doctor Pryne says? For I won't take his charity. Will I be worth eighteen a week to him?"

Lewis himself knew that Petra meant would having a job in Boston hurt the effect Clare desired to obtain of her relation to her stepdaughter. And did the part-time job she would now be holding at Green Doors — that is, evenings and holidays — make the one thousand dollars a guaranteed matter? But what was in Clare's mind when she answered, Lewis was beyond guessing.

"I should try it, anyway, Petra. Of all people, you can trust Doctor Pryne's sincerity. Working for him will be an interesting experience, at the very least, and at the most you will be having some responsible part in the world's work and the joy that that inevitably brings. I think it is very wonderful of Doctor Pryne to take such an interest — and help us all. He is very generous — and understanding."

"And shall I go back to the hall now? They will be wondering where I am, I think."

"Yes. You must go right back, of course. Darling, your frock is charming! You do look too lovely to-night. Tell Dick about your job. He will be particularly interested."

As Petra started to leave, Lewis reached for her hand. She gave it to him as if in contract. But such a contract! "I shall be on time Monday. Thanks again," she said.

Their eyes were almost on a level, when they stood together like this, Lewis was so little taller. And Petra's reticence, a two-edged sword — and for him now — was not merely on guard. It cut down between them, severing all understanding.



Chapter Nine

"I THOUGHT WE WERE ALL RIGHT. THERE AREN'T ANY loose ends that I know of . . ."

Lewis had come to his office half an hour ahead of his usual time on Monday morning in order to prepare his secretary for Petra's appearance there, which would be due, if she kept her word, a few minutes later.

"Certainly there are no loose ends. But that is just the trouble. You are so conscientious that you won't let the sun go down — no, you won't let it rise, and that is the point — on loose ends. You sit up nights over the work. I simply had to get you an assistant and this seemed the opportunity. By the way, and it's very much by the way, did you do what I said and forget the manuscript over the week-end, or did you keep it right by you?"

Miss Frazier did not bother to answer. It was a foolish question. How could she have done what he wanted! His book was going to press in another month. At least, she and the publishers intended that it should. Naturally, she had worked on it over Saturday and

Sunday, and she would continue to do that, if only Doctor Pryne kept his end up, until the thing was in print. But now she would not waste time in defending her industry, with this new girl due any minute.

"Who is she?" Miss Frazier asked. "Where did you find her?"

"It's Petra Farwell. She needed a job so badly that I offered her this one without considering very much her qualifications." He had to admit it. "She has no training but I believe she can typewrite a little. She has done some copying for her father. But whether she can spell or knows how to make out a check, or anything of the sort, I don't know. I thought we'd put her in the reception office with the telephone and the patients. She has a nice clear voice and nice manners. That will relieve you of the part you like least. Isn't it so?"

Petra Farwell! That was the girl, the daughter of the novelist Lowell Farwell, about whom they had been speaking here in the office only a few days ago. A young architect, a Mr. Richard Wilder, had made an appointment for the sole purpose of asking Doctor Pryne to psychoanalyze the novelist's daughter, and he had taken fifteen minutes or more of Doctor Pryne's time doing it. It was with some satisfaction Miss Frazier had already made a memorandum of the bill she was to send for that interview and obtained the doctor's approval of it, — twenty-five dollars. Doctor Pryne had turned down the case, naturally, since he

was not a psychoanalyst, and really, anyway, had time for only serious work; but Miss Frazier remembered that he had accepted an invitation to tea at the Farwell home in the country. And this was the result!

Miss Farwell had not sounded a very attractive person. And why should she, the daughter of Lowell Farwell and the stepdaughter of a very rich woman, need a job so badly that Doctor Pryne had engaged her without consulting his secretary, or assuring himself of her qualifications?

But Miss Frazier pulled herself up at this point in her reflections. She had no business letting herself remember anything that had been said about Miss Farwell in a professional fifteen minutes here in the doctor's sanctum. Her standard for herself was to approximate her employer's professional attitude as closely as possible — one part of the mind for confidences given professionally, and the other, quite separated and even uncolored by that special knowledge, for the social contact. So at this moment she did not show by so much as a lifted eyebrow that she had any intimate knowledge whatever of Miss Farwell's character.

"And I've promised her," the doctor was saying, "that between times, when there's nothing in particular to do for you, she can study shorthand and practice typing. Please order the best textbooks for that, will you, Miss Frazier, this morning, — and a machine. Rent or buy the machine, whichever is more economical. And she will have to have a table for it in the recep-

tion office. You can get that while you are out at lunch. — After she gets going, she might take on some of the book. As I said, she has done copying for her father."

The expression with which his secretary received this last remark, however, showed Lewis his stupid mistake. "I'm just talking through my hat," he said quickly. "That is a hopeless idea, of course. But can you tell me how it is that you appear to be the only known human living who can make out my stuff, Miss Frazier?"

The girl averted her face. Her clear-cut, almost cameo profile kept its accustomed impersonal secretarial look, but her cheek was hot. Lewis saw the unaccustomed color and was annoyed with himself for his second stupidity in the minute.

She said, "It's a sixth sense I have about your writing, I guess. It almost seems so, anyway. I am not so extraordinarily good about all illegible handwriting. But even the first day, yours was pretty clear to me. It surprises me myself."

"Well, that is the best of luck for me," Lewis murmured, and was grateful to hear a door opening and a step out in the reception office. "That must be Petra," he exclaimed, and went out quickly.

He brought her in. But Miss Frazier, at the moment of Petra's entrance, was blind to Petra's bodily reality. It was rather the reflection of her on the doctor's face that Miss Frazier saw and read as easily as she was accustomed to read his illegible script. "It has happened at last," the thought sliced through her brain,

clean, knifelike. And then, flowing through and over the wound, came the tides of her will, cooling the painful gash. "Nobody must guess that it matters. . . . It doesn't matter. . . . It can't matter. . . ."

It was will, too, that jerked her attention from the doctor's mirroring face, after that first second, to the girl herself. There she stood in a cool white frock with a violet-colored felt hat slouched Greta Garbo fashion over bright curls. She looked frightened. Why should she be frightened?

"Miss Frazier will initiate you," the doctor's voice was blurred and as far away as his face, washed over by the tides of Miss Frazier's brave will. "You must ask her anything you need to know as it comes up, Petra. That is the simplest way, I suppose, to learn the ropes. And now I had better have a look at the mail." — It was there, already sorted for him into piles on his desk, with Miss Frazier's accustomed clarifying notes attached.

Miss Frazier took Petra, first, to the dressing room which now they must share. "This door goes into my private office," she explained, "and this into the reception room, which will be in your charge. I'll clear all my personal things out of the desk at once."

When she had taken off her hat and powdered her face, Petra followed the secretary to the desk which was to be, miraculously, her very own, and they stood looking down on it together — both of them inarticulate and at a loss. "Perhaps the best way will be for you merely

to stick around and notice how I answer the telephone to-day," Miss Frazier decided, after a minute of cogitation. "One of your jobs, when you have caught on, will be to take down the names and addresses of the new patients, and file them here in this card drawer. Do you see? Whether the doctor accepts them as patients or not, we want the names and addresses, and the date that they telephoned or came. That is the only recording you will do out here. The rest I attend to, and it all goes into the files in the inner office. The most difficult thing to learn will be which calls to pass on to the doctor, though. I don't myself quite see how he thinks you are going to begin learning that. . . ."

Meanwhile Doctor Pryne, with his door shut, stood looking down at his desk, but not touching the letters. He intended to take Petra out to lunch with him in a few hours and explain to her — although he could never do that really, since he didn't understand it himself — how he had ever been so stupidly forgetful as to mention Teresa's name to Clare, after Petra's warning him not to. Petra would forgive him. She must, of course. And then she would finish about Teresa. Or perhaps Teresa Kerr was living in Boston and would be in at the office this very day to see Petra. Or perhaps Petra would take him to see Teresa. In any case, Lewis' interest in Teresa had increased, almost unreasonably, since Petra had broken off telling him about her, Saturday afternoon.

Now, in another second, he must start in on the day's

work, beginning with the top letter on the right-hand pile — the pile Miss Frazier had marked *immediate*. And when he did start in, he must put Petra out of his mind, — luncheon plans, interrupted confidences, and all. If he was *not* capable of putting Petra clean out of his mind and keeping her there for hours at a stretch, then the situation he had got himself into would be absurd and impossible. But he had offered her the job of his own impulse, and the fact that she had accepted it in a totally different spirit from what he had expected, had nothing to do with her right to keep it. It was hers, of course, just as long as she wanted it, although her reason for wanting it had become a mystery to him. So, he must — in half a second — clear his consciousness of her there just a few feet beyond his closed door — clear it clean as a whistle.

But as he prepared to make the effort, the telephone buzzed at his elbow. Petra's voice came to him, clear, clipped, but a trifle unsteady. "Mrs. Joseph Duffield is calling you from New York, Doctor. Shall I put her through?"

Lewis mentally congratulated his secretary. She had got Petra started already. That was fine. It was Miss Frazier who had decided, of course, that this call was one he would certainly want to take, and now she was showing Petra how to put it through to him. But he foresaw the time, soon, when Petra, if she really was going to save Miss Frazier and be of use to her, must be left to discriminate for herself, and that was going

to mean many mistakes. He frowned, rather, realizing that eventuality, as he said, "Yes, thanks. I'll take it."

Mrs. Duffield's first words, however, put everything else in the world out of Lewis' mind. His fingers gripped the bar of the instrument and he listened with a gray-ing face. Yet, when his turn came to speak, his voice was full of confidence, even buoyant. "You have the very best man. Doctor Stephens is an authority. That gives Michael every human chance possible. You did just the right thing. Tell Michael I am catching the first express and will be there in a few hours. My dear, don't cry. . . ."

He set down the instrument with soft precision then, on the sounds of a woman's sobs. The next instant he was out in his reception office, his hat jammed under one arm, thrusting his letters into the two pockets of his coat, and looking for Miss Frazier. Petra had no existence for him now. She had been wiped from his consciousness by the bitter news he had just received, without need of a struggle after all. Miss Frazier got up from the chair she had drawn close to Petra's while she taught her the use of the telephone switchboard, ready for his demands.

"I'm catching the New York Express. Michael Duffield's got infantile paralysis. He wants me. Stephens is on the case. That gives the kid every chance. I'll call you up to-night if there's anything to tell. Doctor Cotsworth will have to take the clinic to-morrow. Give him the dope on the Pettis case pretty carefully. It's in the

file. Tell Doctor Hagar I'll call him long distance at four this afternoon and to stay in for it. He'll have to handle that Arlington business without me. Put the private patients off by telephone. But you'll have to send a message to McCloud, of course. Give him an appointment for Saturday afternoon. The others will have to wait for appointments till we know when I'll be back. But before you do anything get in touch with the hospital —" But he broke off. "This is nonsense. There isn't time. Grab your hat, bring your book. We'll finish in the taxi."

He remembered the new assistant then and commanded, "Petra, get us a taxi and tell them it's rush. Give her the number, Miss Frazier. I'll get the elevator up."

Miss Frazier followed the doctor out, not bothering about her hat, but her shorthand pad and her fountain pen were clutched in her hand, and she even had the presence of mind to snatch a pencil from Petra's desk in case the pen ran dry. Petra got the promise from the taxi company that the car would be at the door in a minute and then went through to the doctor's office to see whether they actually managed it. To her utter relief, a taxi drew up at the curb just as the doctor and Miss Frazier came out to it. Petra was exhilarated. So far, then, she was a success at this job. There had been no slip. She had been efficient.

Petra had worries enough — even anguish of a sort — to keep her from being radiantly happy over having a

job. Yet it was a dream come true. A year ago, why, even this spring, she *would* have been radiantly happy. But then it needn't have been a double job; she needn't have lived at Green Doors and done the stepdaughter act evenings and holidays. She would have gone to stay with Teresa and they would really have lived. Such freedom, such self-respect, and happiness as would have been hers then! That was the way she had planned it, exhilarated by the very imagining. And now — how different —.

But suddenly Petra forgot brilliant might-have-beens, for her telephone was ringing! She flew. She slipped into her chair, knees under the desk, her spine very straight and businesslike, her eyes grave and listening. — "This is Doctor Pryne's office." — And whoever was at the other end of the wire must have known from the pure and winged quality of her voice that the person answering Doctor Pryne's telephone was young, beautiful, and very much on the job.

"Ordinarily you and I must not tell each other, or discuss, things that come up in Doctor Pryne's work, — not in terms of personalities, anyway. But Michael, of course, is different. He isn't a 'case.' It is almost as if a child of Doctor Pryne's had infantile paralysis. Why, it isn't even almost. It is just the same, really. That's why I've told you about Michael. It would be inhuman for you not to know, when Doctor Pryne returns, whether the boy is lost or saved — how he is feeling about it."

The two girls were talking in Miss Frazier's private office at the end of Petra's first day. Petra had her Greta Garbo hat jammed down over her bright curls, ready to drive out to Green Doors with Dick Wilder, whose car was waiting down on Marlboro Street. She had just looked down from Miss Frazier's window and seen it.

"I am so grateful you did tell me," she assured the secretary. "And I am going to ask something. Would you call me up at Meadowbrook to-night — reversed charges — if you hear anything from New York? It's as if I knew Michael himself now — from your telling."

Two years ago, Michael's grandmother had been brought to Doctor Pryne's clinic. This was what Miss Frazier had just told Petra. The old lady was insane and had to be placed in an asylum. Trailing along with the neighbors who had taken it upon themselves to bring the poor creature to the clinic was the boy, Michael, aged nine, who now, without his grandmother, was alone and would also become a charge of the State. But Doctor Pryne had taken Michael home with him that night.

"He brought him into the office the next morning," Miss Frazier had told Petra. "He actually wanted to adopt the kid himself. He was a most interesting and lovable little fellow really; but what the doctor could have done with him if he had kept him I cannot imagine. He lives in an apartment hotel because he does not want to bother with a housekeeper. Adopting Michael would have meant a housekeeper, of course, and a real home. But that wasn't what made Doctor Pryne give up the

idea in the end. He would have created a home for that child, given up all his freedom to do it, I am sure, if Michael hadn't been a Catholic. That made Doctor Pryne feel that he ought to have a Catholic upbringing. It would be the child's best chance, Doctor Pryne was sure, for living down the frightful memories of his grandmother's slowly developing insanity. Only continuity in the child's religious life could carry him on over the break which had come so tragically in his family life. Little Michael had adored his old grandmother and she had been everything to him until her reason began to go. Then she had commenced beating him and imagining he had done things he had never thought of doing. It was horrible.

"Doctor Pryne kept Michael a month or more, trying to decide what to do with him. But he was always worried, wondering what he was up to in the hours between school and the end of work here, when they could be together. Then Doctor Pryne remembered his friend, Mrs. Duffield. She's a Catholic, a widow with seven children, and a close friend of Doctor Pryne's. She is extraordinarily beautiful-looking and that had something to do with the doctor's choosing her. No, I mean it. It did! Michael was so sensitive to beauty and he had had so little of it! Doctor Pryne thinks he has genius. I can't see myself that Michael's drawings are remarkable but the doctor says they are. Anyway, when he remembered how beautiful she was, and that she was a Catholic, he took Michael right to New York and persuaded Mrs.

Duffield to adopt him. She did it — over night, practically. He would be her eighth child and they are all boys, but she was delighted all the same, after she had had him there for an hour. Pretty lucky she has so much money and didn't have to think about that! Doctor Pryne goes to New York to 'play' with them every few months. They all do wonderful things together, — music, riding in the park, even sea trips. When he comes back from New York he looks almost as if he'd had a year's vacation. He's devoted to the whole Duffield family, but Michael is the apple of his eye. It's picturesque, isn't it!"

Petra had thought about it, her eyes on Miss Frazier's pale face. The day had been hot even for June and Miss Frazier had been typing for dear life. Petra had heard her machine going madly hour after hour, in here, through the closed door. That might account for the pallor, but Petra thought not.

"It *is* picturesque," she agreed thoughtfully. "I hope, for your sake as well as Doctor Pryne's and Michael's, that — that it turns out all right. I hadn't been realizing — hadn't taken in — how anxious you have been all day. I was thinking only of myself, I guess. I thought it was I, that I was to blame, — that you didn't really like my being here. I am sorry now I was so blind and — and egotistical. It was Michael all the time that made you so silent!"

Miss Frazier had leaned back in her chair at this point and lifted her eyes to her new assistant's. Before she looked away from that earnest young face, she knew

that she could never resent this girl. It was no longer a case of willing. She said to herself in surprise, "She is kind and strangely gentle. She's a dear!"

Petra's thought of Miss Frazier in that meeting of their glances had been as sure and swift as Miss Frazier's of her. Dick Wilder, when Petra had returned to her party, Saturday night, to have the next dance with him, had said that Doctor Pryne's secretary was ridiculously starchy and self-important. He had quite frightened Petra of her. — Well, he had been wrong. Miss Frazier was a simply grand person. Her grandness was there in the very curve of her eyelashes and the line of her nose.

Now Miss Frazier was promising: "Yes, when the doctor calls me to-night, I'll call you. I have a hunch it will be good news, since they got Doctor Stephens onto it so promptly. He's the last word on infantile paralysis."

Impulsively Petra came nearer the desk. "Miss Frazier," she said, "I have a friend I would love you to know. And she you. May I take you to see her some time? She is my best friend. We have been friends for years. She has studied to be a private secretary. I think you will like knowing each other."

Petra in that moment had no thought of making a friend for herself of Miss Frazier. What had she to offer this clear-cut, high-salaried, dependable person! But Teresa had everything to give her. Teresa and Miss Frazier must know each other. That they would be friends seemed inevitable.

She's kind and strangely gentle. She's a dear. . . .

She's a simply grand person. Good enough to know Teresa. . . .

Friendship is as independent of time as is Eternity. It may require years to arrive, or it may be there, how and why unknown, as if it had always existed, at the trembling of a leaf. Miss Frazier and Teresa were bound to be friends, sooner or later. But to her complete astonishment, as Petra hurried belatedly down to join Dick in his car, she realized that she and Miss Frazier were friends already.



Chapter Ten

CYNTHIA ALLEN WAS SITTING AT HER DRESSING TABLE giving her make-up its final touches for dinner and the evening and chatting in the direction of her husband, who was over on the window seat skimming the *Transcript*. The real reading would come later, after dinner, with the radio for accompaniment. But in spite of Harry's being directly in the open window, and silent while Cynthia was vocal, it was she, not he, who knew that a car had turned in at their driveway, and ran, lipstick in hand, to kneel beside him and see who it was. For Cynthia, like most adults, if they told the truth about it, felt that every sound of a car's brakes, every ring of a bell, every knock, might be a possible harbinger of Destiny.

In the present instance, however, there was no grinding of brakes where the Allens' driveway met the highway, for Lewis' glittering, long-bodied roadster was very nearly silent in all its ways. What Cynthia had heard was merely the spurt of gravel between her gates. "If only Lewis would live up to his car!" she often

sighed to herself. "If he would have an important-looking office and good-looking tailored clothes!" But she supposed that the car was a tool in his work and that was why he allowed himself always the latest and most expensive model.

"It's Lewis," she told Harry, who had not so much as turned his head. Harry's apparent indifference did not deceive his wife, however, nor irritate her. She imagined him every bit as sensitive as herself to the possibilities attending the unexpected; putting off the moment of knowing merely prolonged his agreeable suspense. "But Lewis is a thoughtless beast," she said aloud. "He might have called up. Nellie will be frantic."

Then she pushed up the screen and leaned over the sill. Her brother had seen her and stopped under the window.

"Go right around to the kitchen," she whispered down, her hands funneling her lips. "Tell Nellie that I didn't invite you or dream you were coming, that you're not company, and she's not to do the least bit of fussing for you. I wouldn't go near her on a bet, myself, but you, with your wide experience, may know how to handle a maddened woman."

Before Lewis had started on, she leaned from the window again and called down in her natural voice, "Harry says we're delighted you've come."

A minute later her eyes met her husband's in the mirror of her dressing table. Her own were worried and

Harry was curious about it. She answered his silent question.

"Harry! I don't like it. I don't like it a bit. I'm — deeply troubled."

"My dear! You blessed idiot! I thought it was merely your idea of being funny. What has happened to your sense of humor? If Nellie doesn't like it, she can lump it. What's it to us! She isn't such a hot cook, anyway. Besides —"

But Cynthia was laughing. "Blessed idiot yourself!" she crowed, but went on quickly serious again. "It isn't Nellie; it's Lewis I mind! See here! This is Thursday, isn't it? Lewis was here over the week-end and now he's back again. Twice in one week. Why, do you suppose?"

But Harry had no idea. Certainly it was unprecedented. And Cynthia went on. "Well, I'll tell you. Lewis has come to see his new stenographer. Being with her all day in town — having Petra right there in his office from nine to four every single day in the week — isn't enough. He has to come shooting twenty miles out to Green Doors to spend the evening with her. He's a lost soul, I tell you."

"But this isn't Green Doors! This is my house. He has come to see me and the kids — perhaps even you. If he wanted to be with Petra Farwell, he could take her out to dinner in town or to the Country Club. Just the two of 'em. No need to go all around Robin Hood's barn to get at her. But even if Petra lived here and he

had come to see her — what of it? What's the matter with Petra? Why shouldn't Lewis be left to choose his own girl? Why need you fasten such an expression onto a perfectly good face over it?"

Cynthia looked deeply into her mirror, curious to see what the expression was. She answered amiably, "Lewis must choose for himself, of course. But I have a right to my concern, haven't I? He isn't seriously in love with Petra. He couldn't be. It's merely her youth and beauty. . . . I'm sure of it. . . . Mere physical attraction!"

Harry got up and started for the door. He had business with the cocktails and also he must welcome his brother-in-law. But he turned back, for a minute. "*Mere youth and beauty? Mere physical attraction?* You might as well say 'mere dynamite' and have done with it," he said seriously. "You and your meres! You're an idiot. . . . We are happily married. Ten years happy. Who are you to be babbling like some old maid of 'mere physical attraction.' Mere lightning — and you know it! Look here! If they are really that way about each other — well, let's hope they'll be happy."

"Harry, you can't make me mad. I know you're an idealist."

"Am I? Perhaps. But I'm not a sentimentalist."

"Do you think I am?"

"When you say 'mere physical attraction' you are. A woman who has been a lover herself for ten years! It's mawkish and insincere."

"But you and I are intellectually congenial, Harry!"

"We weren't when we married. We've developed along the same lines since, that's all. But it was passion that melted us up and made our mental and spiritual amalgamation a reality. We only thought we were congenial, those early days, because we wanted each other so desperately."

"Even if you're right," Cynthia said quickly, "it mightn't turn out with Lewis and Petra as it has with us. I don't see how it could. She's so shallow."

"Of course nobody knows how it will turn out ever. But if they're drawn to each other by mere — mere — what was it you said they were drawn by? I don't remember — but what you meant was mere cosmic forces — I guess you'll have to let that attraction take its course, and remain a mere sister who hasn't a thing to say. Sorry, darling. But you annoy me, rather." He kissed her, all the same, as if that was what he had come back for.

Cynthia had guessed right. Lewis was really headed for Green Doors, intending only to dine with the Allens en route. He told Cynthia and Harry about his summons to New York and gave them a dramatic account of the latest methods in the treatment of infantile paralysis, but he was careful to wait until the children were safely out of earshot. Little Michael Duffield was going to get well and the probability was that he would suffer no permanent disability from his terrible experience. The other Duffield children had been packed off

to the shore in charge of tutors and with a trained nurse to watch for symptoms. They had gone off in two large cars and were living in an isolated cottage to meet all the requirements of quarantine. But Mrs. Duffield herself was staying with her adopted boy and would not join the others until he was well enough to be taken with her, unless one of her own children developed the disease.

"There is almost no limit to what modern science can do, with wealth to back it up," Cynthia commented.

But Lewis met this with silence. He had just been through a twenty-four-hour agonizing suspense, when all that science had to give, and all that wealth could buy, and even all that love could plead, had waited on — a Mystery. And the Mystery, over and over, during those dread hours, had been named by Mrs. Duffield, "God's Will." Lewis' face was strained and his eyes still heavy from watching.

The Allens were a little embarrassed by the way Lewis had taken the business; but they were touched as well. They knew how peculiarly devoted to this little Michael he was. Cynthia was glad, indeed, that she herself had not known that the boy was so ill all these past days, and Lewis with him. That would have worried her for her brother's sake infinitely more than this Petra business was worrying her. Petra fears, in fact, had dwindled, in the face of all that Lewis had just told them, into mere goblin phantoms.

But even so she remarked, "It's funny, but do you

know, I don't believe Clare knows you've been away any more than we did. Petra couldn't have told them. And what's still more inexplicable, Petra has gotten home late every evening and hardly has time to dress for dinner. Clare rather implied that you were overworking her, keeping her such unconscionable hours! And all the time you haven't been there at all!"

Lewis' eyelids just flickered but he gave no other sign. He had told Miss Frazier by telephone this morning that he would take an afternoon train and be at the office at the usual time to-morrow morning. But Mrs. Duffield had persuaded him to fly instead, and that swift and luxurious way of travel had brought him to Boston late this afternoon. He had dropped around at the office and found Miss Frazier still there. She had sent Petra home early, she said, because of the heat; and the other afternoons she had let Petra catch the three-forty express for Meadowbrook, thinking there was so little need for two of them with the doctor away. — What was the mystery? Why need Petra be so devious, Lewis asked himself. But he was glad he had been warned. Very glad. He might so easily have betrayed her to-night, later, at Green Doors.

It was dark when Lewis drove up the Green Doors road and recognized Dick's car standing before the door. He was taken to the library, after having sent in his name and been left waiting a minute or two in the hall. The maid who had admitted him had seemed none too sure that any one was at home. He realized the reason

for her caution when he saw what his visit was interrupting. Lowell Farwell was reading aloud from his own manuscript. Clare was picturesquely erect in a corner of the divan, working on a brilliant square of needle-point. Dick lounged and smoked a briar pipe beside her, looking rather romantic, young and very handsome. The author himself sat facing them, his hands full of canary-colored scratch paper. — Lewis was, had he known it, the sole person who would have been allowed to interrupt the reading.

He was welcomed warmly. Clare's inward smile indeed was as brilliant, as warm, as that on her lips and in her eyes. So soon! She had given Doctor Pryne two or three weeks before he would allow himself to return — and here he was back within the week! Doctor Lewis Pryne! The inaccessible! The unobtainable! It was more than gratifying. It was — exciting and delightful. . . .

"Too bad Petra isn't at home," she said at once. "She won't like missing you. But she said there was extra work to-night and she would have supper somewhere with Miss Frazier and then get back to it. I thought you must be there in person, cracking the slave whip, Doctor. Awfully nice to have you here instead!"

This time, because he was prepared, Lewis did not so much as blink. "No, it wasn't necessary for me to stay. But I am interrupting. You shouldn't have been 'at home.'"

Lowell Farwell was putting away the manuscript.

"Nothing of the kind," he exclaimed. "I can read to Clare any time. Dick came to play with Petra and I did the ancient mariner turn with him; so *he* won't mind my stopping. It isn't every day I get a chance to talk with a genuine psychologist. If I hadn't gone in for writing, Doctor Pryne, I should be in your field. Do you, by the way, read Dostoevsky? The Russians know a thing or two. They aren't afraid of turning to the findings of morbid psychology for suggestion, at least, in their studies of human character. . . ."

It was sometime after ten when Petra let herself softly in at the front door. The library door had been left open after Lewis' interruption of the reading and she heard voices. Dick's. Her father's. If Lewis had happened to speak as she crossed the hall, she would never have gone on and in. She would have stolen away to bed and sent a maid to tell Clare she was at home. It was too late to retreat when she saw Lewis. Her face hardened as she came forward. So Clare had won. They had not known at the office — she and Miss Frazier — that Doctor Pryne had even returned, and yet here he was the first hour he was back, sitting beside her step-mother, helping her wind up a ball of yarn. But it was stupid to be so surprised. Hadn't she known ever since Saturday evening that Clare had Doctor Pryne in tow! If it were not so, he would never have betrayed Petra's confidences to her as he had done.

Clare entranced every one, of course, — except Petra herself. But Saturday afternoon, when Doctor Pryne

had walked with Petra across to the guest-house piazza and sat there, listening to the bobolink, and Petra had been moved to be herself with him, and even to talk about Teresa, she had thought that Doctor Pryne would be the one exception to the general rule. He would be her friend — Petra's — not Clare's. *He would see through Clare.* He belonged to herself and Teresa. That meeting, long ago in the Cambridge apartment, had made him belong. Or rather they had been deceived — and thought so. Where had the idea come from, anyway? Teresa had been as illusioned as Petra herself. And when he held her chair for her at Clare's tea table — and even more, while she sat silent beside him, and could not make herself eat or drink because it was so wonderful that he had come at last — Petra had *known* that he understood her and was close to her in some indefinable but real way. She had known but she had known a lie. It was an illusion brought away out of childhood; and she had been enticed from her secret fastness by it, the fastness where she hid from Clare and all of the life here at Green Doors.

Doctor Pryne was holding a chair for her at this minute as he had held the chair under the elm. The same look was on his face. If she did not watch out, she would be betrayed by it into sincerity again, into being simply herself.

"Darling! You should have called up from the station. I'd have sent a car for you. I suppose you came in a taxi. I didn't hear it. I was beginning to worry, really.

Here's Elise with punch. You're just in time, Elise. We are famished. Petra, you do look tired. Pass them to Miss Farwell first, Elise. Darling, you don't look tired, you look *exhausted*."

Clare was justified in the observation. Petra's face was shadowed by obvious weariness, and Lewis thought that her long, sun-burned fingers held the stem of her goblet of punch with a counterfeit steadiness. Sheer will was keeping her steady — and hard. He was certain of it.

Lewis himself did not sit down again. He said that he must go. It would be midnight as it was when he got to his rooms, and work would be piled sky-high to-morrow after his absence. But he did not say this. They were not to know that he had been away and not seen his office for several days, since Petra had not told them. And if the child was fearful that he had already explained that he had never kept her working over hours, he would relieve her mind at once. But how?

He said, as casually as he could, "No need to be on time to-morrow, Petra. Mrs. Farwell thinks I'm a slave driver and it will be true unless we call a halt. After this, your hours are to be from nine till four, as we first agreed, and an hour out for lunch."

Petra was quick to understand. So they *had* told him! He knew about her lies! But he had not given her away and was not doing so now. That was strange. Why? And it seemed almost as if he were promising her, indirectly, that he had no intention of giving her away at all. At the same time, he was laying a command on her: she

must not use this particular excuse ever again to gain her private ends, whatever they were. Oh, yes, Petra thought she understood, and humiliation drowned what might have been gratitude.

As for Lewis, he had never known that young eyes could hold such dumb, repressed misery as he saw in those that Petra slowly raised to his own, when she returned his formal "good night" with one more formal. But he had only meant to reassure her. Did she think he was taunting or judging? It was intolerable that she should have any such idea. It was intolerable that he should have wounded her and that he could not explain himself to her to-night, before she slept. But could he explain himself to her to-morrow? Could he explain himself to himself, if it came to that? Did he know why he was not appalled by this girl's deceit and why he was not angry with her for having put him in an unfair position by her lies? If he had only been self-disciplined enough, sensible enough, to have waited until morning to see Petra! Now the night was going to be much longer than it would have been had he never come out here at all. And he had thought to have shortened it by coming!

Lowell Farwell accompanied Lewis out to the street door, insisting again, as they crossed the spaces of the great hall, that he would never know all about morbid psychology until he had made a thorough study of the Russian novelist, Dostoevsky, — and, possibly, a few other even more modern writers of psychological novels.

For your novelist knew intuitively what your psychologist only came at through experiment, and he knew it first.

"Yes, read the great novelists," Farwell advised Lewis, with an almost passionate insistence. "Read Thomas Mann. Read Hardy. And above all read Dostoevsky. Then you might even read some Americans. There are one — or two — you know —"

Lewis got away quickly without admitting the fact that he knew his Dostoevsky practically by heart. Somehow, he hoped he would never have to hear Farwell patronizing that master or comparing his novels to his own, even by implication. Lewis wanted not to detest Petra's father.



Chapter Eleven

MISS FRAZIER PUT A LIST OF FRIDAY'S APPOINTMENTS on Petra's desk. "This is going to be a crowded day," she said. "Here they are. The doctor won't be able to see anybody who's not down here, unless it is something very special, and you'll have to decide that. Of course, they'll all say it is very special. You'll have to judge in spite of what they say. If you get puzzled, just tell them to telephone again later, or, if it's somebody calling, keep them until I come out and you can ask me about it. But I think you won't have to do either of those things. I think you'll be perfectly able to decide anything that comes up for yourself, Petra."

"But Janet!" They were Petra and Janet to each other — had been since the second day. "You're throwing me in and telling me to swim. Suppose I make a mistake?"

"Well, that will be just too bad!" But Janet belied the slangy irony of the words by a quizzical accompanying smile. "It's the way I myself began," she said. "And after all, you have had several days now of answering

telephones and talking to people here, with me right beside you. I never had any such start. Don't worry. Just dive in. You'll be all right. I know it." The doctor's buzzer had sounded and she had to hurry away to the inner sanctum.

Petra, who had only just arrived at the office, was a little late. Dick Wilder had slept last night at the Allens' and offered to drive her into town this morning. He had, however, overslept and been late in coming for her. But that had seemed a feeble explanation when Petra offered it to Janet a minute ago and she hoped now that Doctor Pryne need not know of it. Janet, she felt sure, would not mention it unless he asked. As his door was soundproof, the chances were he did not know whether she had come late or early. He himself had been in there since eight. But she decided to depend only on the trains after this. They were never late. She wanted, with all her soul, to be as scrupulous and perfect as humanly possible in this job.

She went into the dressing room, put her hat on the shelf, powdered her face and held her wrists for a few seconds under the cold-water faucet. The papers had promised a day of record-breaking heat for June, and now, only a little after nine, the thermometer in the dressing-room window, here in the shade, registered eighty-five. Petra was not like Clare — and Shelley — elated and toned up by heat. Hot city days frightened her a little and filled her with an anticipation of some unknown but dreaded eventuality. But now that she had

a real and an important job, she must be superior to this idiosyncrasy, must keep her mind clear for action and deny the childish mood.

It was not yet time for the telephone to begin its morning bombardment and she would have leisure for a little study. Getting her shorthand textbook out of its drawer, she drew pencil and paper toward her and prepared for strenuous work. Janet had been "an angel" (Petra's expression) and constituted herself Petra's shorthand teacher. She said that there was no reason whatever why Petra, at the end of a year's work here, shouldn't be prepared to take dictation from anybody, typewrite rapidly, and have a profession at her finger tips. But during this year of learning, Petra was determined to be worth every dollar that Doctor Pryne paid her. He was not her friend — he never could be now — and it must be a strictly business exchange between them and an honest one. . . . If you really use your brain, really concentrate, heat — even city heat — is nothing. The human brain, and the will back of it, *cut through discomfort like a knife*. Well, perhaps that was all that Clare meant, when she always said that hot days exhilarated her. Overcoming the wretchedness of stifling heat, being superior to it, was the exhilaration. Indeed, Petra found herself exhilarated at this moment. It was exhilarating to concentrate on these word-symbols, master them, and be of some account in the world!

But at this moment of full content — for it was content — Petra's telephone surprisingly buzzed. Her voice

— she heard it herself, answering — had an elated ring. But the voice that sounded in reply was no strange voice from the outside. It was Doctor Pryne himself, speaking to her from behind his closed door only a few yards away. He was asking her to have lunch with him at one-thirty at the Copley.

"I'm sorry. I'm lunching with Dick Wilder. I'm afraid I can't."

That is all she said and it was uttered with polite deliberateness. But her hand, putting down the telephone, was shaking. And this surprising phenomenon had hardly impressed itself on Petra's attention before she was aware of the thunderous circulation of her blood. . . . What had so startled her body! Her employer's voice, it seemed. But the invitation and her having to refuse it had meant very little to her conscious thinking self. Did the body have a life of its own, then, — fears and delights, even thoughts of its own? It seemed so. But she had first learned it on Saturday afternoon, when Doctor Pryne had lighted her cigarette for her. As he held the match, her body had given her this same surprise then. It had been Doctor Pryne then and it was Doctor Pryne again now. He had more significance to her, it seemed, than she herself knew. But her body knew. . . . It was instinct of some sort, she supposed. She was remembering one astonishing experience she had had of an animal's instinct. It occurred the summer she had been sent to camp where there was riding. She and a few others had lost their way on the

country roads and had been caught by the dark. Petra was riding ahead, loving the dark and the adventure, when suddenly her horse stopped and she felt him bristling under her. She felt his fear but stubbornly tried to urge him on. Whatever he was afraid of, they must get away from it. She was as frightened as the horse, but her desire was to plunge on and out of the situation — whatever it was. But a wiser and older girl, coming along, dismounted, walked cautiously a few yards ahead and found that a bridge was down over a deep gorge. Petra's horse could not have seen it. Had the sound of the rushing water proclaimed no bridge above it to his sensitive ears? . . . But what bridge was down now? Why was her blood thundering like this and her mind at a standstill?

It passed almost as suddenly as it had come. The thundering blood sank back to the unknown and unconscious rhythms of its usual courses. But as this was Petra's second experience only of the alert separate mind of the body, she was left strangely shaken by it. It took some effort to return her attention to the shorthand textbook, and she was glad when the telephone finally began ringing in earnest and she could put aside her self-imposed and solitary work.

For a while everything went smoothly. Petra really seemed to have an instinct for discriminating between the important and unimportant and it is certain that her magnetic young voice won instant confidence from the unseen inquirers; they felt that she would remember

their requests and do her best in getting Doctor Pryne's attention for them the first minute possible. She wrote everything down in a tidy, self-conscious hand and filed what should be filed, all the while feeling effectual and important. If the few patients waiting their turns in the little room looked at her more than at the magazines and books they pretended to be reading, she was unaware of it.

The door into the outer hall was standing wide open in the interest of all the draft possible; and so since Petra's shoulder was turned that way, and the latest comer wore rubber-soled sneakers, she was not aware of him until he came around her desk and stood over her. The little desk, as he stood before her, leaning on it, suddenly became spindly, a mere chip, he was so large and dynamic. He was looking at Petra in surprise that she was not Janet. So she read his expression. She noticed, even in her first startled glance up at him, how blue the eyes were in his bronzed face and how the black brows over them met in a straight line across his high, straight nose. She had never seen eyes of so intense and deep a blue, she thought. They were rather like her own, had she realized it, for it was a strange coincidence, but the girl at the desk and the man bending over it might have been brother and sister. Their coloring, their physiques and their vitality were all in the same key.

The surprise in the man's face was perhaps more like anger than surprise, after all. A sort of tortured anger, Petra thought. The intense blue of his eyes burned down

at her with angry questioning. But his fine, clean-cut lips were set in a defiant line as if he meant never to speak. The thought flashed through Petra's mind that he might be an insane patient of Doctor Pryne's who had broken loose from confinement and was seeking out the man who had consigned him to the asylum, to shoot him. But instantly she knew it wasn't so; the fire in the intense blue eyes was fire of intelligence burning to an expression almost as articulate as speech.

"Do you want to see Doctor Pryne?" she asked. "I am sorry but —"

She got no farther. He had reached a swift hand and snatching a letter from the top of the pile the postman had only a minute ago deposited there, turned it over and, picking up a pencil, wrote on its back, "I am dumb. Neil McCloud. No appointment. Only want to see Pryne for a minute. Will wait till he can work me in."

Dumb! This vital creature, radiating power and strength! Petra held out her hand for the pencil. But he did not give it to her. He wrote again, the strokes of his script swift and angry, "I'm not deaf. Speak!"

"Sit down," she said. She could not talk to him while he towered like that. It was like standing under an avalanche of physical and mental force. There was a chair close to her desk. He took it. She felt that he might mind having the other patients, who had appointments, hear him being refused one, and so she leaned toward him and explained the situation almost in a whisper. Doctor Pryne had been out of town and as

a consequence was extraordinarily busy to-day. He couldn't possibly see people without appointments, even for a minute. But next week — She took up the appointment book. The minute McCloud had written his name Petra had placed him, for on Janet's advice she had studied and learned the names of the regular patients by heart during her first day here. She fluttered the pages of her book and came to McCloud. He had an appointment for Saturday afternoon, to-morrow. That was odd. Janet had said that Doctor Pryne kept his weekends absolutely free for his writing. But here it was in Janet's hand — McCloud, four o'clock, June 28.

She hesitated over it. Ought she to suggest that Mr. McCloud wait for Janet's next appearance from the inner office? This was the first time to-day that Petra had felt so uncertain of her ground. But then she decided, "No. I'm in. I must swim. That is what both Doctor Pryne and Janet expect of me. McCloud'll have to wait for his appointment like everybody else." — She looked across at him. Blue eyes met blue eyes, his tormented and angry, hers cool but sorry. "I'm sorry —" she began, but again he snatched at the pencil. "OK," he almost tore it into the envelope. And then he added, underlining it, "Don't tell him I called. I'd rather you didn't. Back Saturday."

Halfway to the door he swung around and came back to Petra. She handed him the pencil. He wrote — but this time in small, scrupulously clear characters — "You're a damned beautiful girl." She had read it easily

upside down as he wrote but he was gone before the color flamed in her face.

A few minutes later, when Janet came out of the inner sanctum, trailing a patient, and went over to Petra's desk, Petra showed her the envelope; but she had erased McCloud's last remark. The secretary frowned. It worried her, for some reason or other. That was obvious. After a minute of brooding over it, she whispered, "I'm sorry you let him go, Petra. The doctor would have made a point of seeing Mr. McCloud. It must be something very special he wanted, really special, I mean. But you couldn't know. . . . I think we'd better do what he asks and not say anything about it now to the doctor. It would bother him. I'm sorry I wasn't here. He must have hated explaining to you about his speech. He's morbidly sensitive about it. It was hard enough the first time he came and wrote it all down for me — but to have to do it all over again —"

So it was as bad as that! Janet's expression even more than the words she said told Petra how serious a blunder she had made in sending McCloud away. It was so serious, in fact, that Janet wanted to protect Doctor Pryne from knowing that it had happened at all. But as to the man's embarrassment, Petra was skeptical, remembering the sentence she had read upside down!

"But look here, Petra, don't let this one first mistake discourage you," Janet murmured quickly, as the doctor's buzzer summoned her to bring in the next patient. "Go on swimming. Don't get self-mistrustful. It's like

riding. After a spill you must get right up and mount again, or you're queered. Better luck next time."

At lunch Dick Wilder found Petra more bafflingly uncommunicative than usual, even, and she ate almost nothing of the very expensive and knowing meal he had ordered for her. What use was it for him to chatter on about Green Doors — and incidentally, of course, Clare — with some one who murmured back mere Yeses and Noes! The only consolation that Dick got from that luncheon hour was the overt admiration he saw in surrounding faces for his companion. These men and women had no way of knowing that his companion was as completely uninteresting as she was completely beautiful. They probably thought him much to be envied, extraordinarily lucky.

"Look here," he said rather desperately, when he opened the door of his car to let her out in front of her office building, "let me drive you out to-night, Petra. It will be beastly going in the train in this heat."

"Clare is giving that big dinner party to-night," Petra reminded him. "She won't have a minute for you. Some other night."

But Dick persisted. He was ready to take his chances. When they got to Green Doors he would go in with Petra for a few minutes and stay talking. Clare might be around somewhere. They could exchange one word at least, one look. It would be little Sophia's bedtime. He might be invited up to the nursery to join with little Sophia's nurse in her role of enchanted chorus

to the nightly repeated scene — the cherub's supper hour. But he said nothing of his real designs to Petra. He merely exclaimed, "What has Clare to do with it? You're a funny girl! It's you I'm asking. I'll be down here at the door at four."

Janet's door, the doctor's door, the door into the public hall were all wide open when Petra got back. Janet heard her come in and sang out from the dressing room, "I'm just off for lunch, Petra. Won't be gone twenty minutes. Too hot to eat." Then, as Petra came up behind her, she turned from the mirror where she had been adjusting her hat and her voice changed. "You poor child! What is the matter?"

"Nothing. What should be?" Petra put away her hat and got out her compact. But Janet would not accept the nonchalant denial. "I know what's wrong. That McCloud business. But cheer up. For months after I began this job I averaged about half a dozen mistakes a week. Nobody's infallible. And anyway, I've reconsidered it. There is no real reason why that young man should consider himself an exception and come around without appointments. He did the same thing last week. And Doctor Pryne saw him and was over an hour late in leaving the office as a consequence. To-day he would probably have gone without his lunch. It's really rather cheeky. To-day may make him see it. I myself wouldn't have dared send him off, because I know how the doctor feels, but you didn't know, and he only got what

he deserves. So cheer up. You're in charge now till I return. The doctor won't be back before half-past two, probably."

But Petra was not much comforted. Her confidence in her own adequacy had been so high only so few hours ago! And ever since the McCloud incident she had felt dashed. But how was she to know who was important, of the people who came to the office or called on the telephone, as long as they remained merely names to her in her appointment book and in the bare files in her desk. Janet, of course, knew the intimate details of all the cases. She took their "histories" down in shorthand, and even some of the conferences later, and filed them in the big steel cases in the inner office. If Petra, now, had known something of Mr. McCloud's "history," she might have known what to do with him this morning. But Janet, in initiating her into the work, had told her absolutely nothing of the personalities she would so soon be dealing with. Her information had confined itself strictly to names and ages. It was too great a handicap!

Besides, Petra was interested on her own account in this McCloud now. Very much so! Any one would be . . . His tormented impatient look. . . . The way his very black brows met in a straight line over his straight high nose. She had never seen brows like that. It gave a look of dominance, of strength. . . . His hands were the hands of a workman, stained with oil or grease, and the fingernails were cut very short where they

were not broken. Yet strangely, those hands were as expressive and impatient as his face. . . . And the upside-down sentence — well — that was a touch of mere deviltry. His eyes had mocked, as he pushed the envelope toward her — and was gone!

The heat in the reception office was stifling. Holding your wrists under water really didn't help, except for the minute you were doing it. As for getting out the shorthand textbook in this lull between the morning and afternoon appointments, Petra simply couldn't. She was smothered, dismayed by the heat. It was really a kind of drowning, this airlessness. Janet had looked so cool and superior to it. She had said, "It's torrid, isn't it!" but she hadn't minded it really. She had created the effect, even as she mentioned it, of brushing mere physical discomfort from her clear, cool self as if it were a fly.

There was, however, a slight breeze coming through from Doctor Pryne's big windows. A paper on his desk rustled intermittently. It might blow off. Petra decided to go in there and put a book or an inkwell, some solid object, on it. But when she had secured the object — a package of Luckies, as it happened — she turned away from the desk to the steel filing case across the room and stood looking at it curiously. She could read the letters on the faces of the boxes from where she stood.



Chapter Twelve

PETRA WAS PULLING OUT THE DRAWER MARKED IN small black letters Mc. She pulled it slowly, as one might open a door onto an unknown landscape. She herself thought of Alice. "It might be the rabbit hole and here am I on the verge of tumbling down it." Indeed, she felt herself a second Alice and as if this deep drawer held a wonderland into which she was about to escape from the stifling hot afternoon of the upper world. Could she have known what it held for her, how different her hesitation in going on pulling out the drawer would have been, how much faster her heart would have beat!

She ran her fingers over the tops of the stiff white cards and came to those marked at the upper right-hand corners, "Neil McCloud." There were dozens of them in McCloud's own handwriting — the handwriting, at least, of that one last sentence of his which she had read upside down. Petra lifted them out, removing first the metal clip that held them together. Leaving the Mc drawer open, she leaned against other closed drawers and started to read.

Neil McCloud. Age twenty-six. Irish-American. Catholic. No known insanity in family.

It read as if it had been written in answer to questions put to him by Doctor Pryne. Ordinarily the patient would have answered vocally, and Janet, or Doctor Pryne, taken it all down; but in this case, since McCloud could not speak, the answers were written by the patient himself. It seemed that the small, scrupulous script of the upside-down sentence was his ordinary writing when he was not furious. . . .

Petra turned the card over and read on: "Oldest of five. Father a garage proprietor in Springfield, Mass. I graduated from High School tenth in class of ninety. My mother wanted me to go to college but I wouldn't. Went to work for my father as a stop-gap. Wanted to get with airplanes. Father paid me a skilled mechanic's wages because I was by that time a skilled mechanic, — grew up with the engines, so to speak. Machinery interested me more than books. Except aeronautics books. Read all of those the library had and bought all I could find. I got in with the fellow who runs the Ocean Road Airport. Spent all my spare time there. Took flying lessons by moonlight. Bought a second-hand plane on savings and credit and began taking people up for hire. Father against it. Wouldn't let me live at home unless I worked for him. . . . One day my kid brother turned up at the field. He was the baby. Eleven years old. I knew the folks had forbidden him to go up with me. All the kids were forbidden. But he had hooked a ride

out, skipped school, and said he would tell father when he got home, and take his licking. He hated lickings as much as anybody, but it would be worth it to fly. I agreed with him it would. He was captain of his grade football team, a great little kid. After my mother, I guess he meant more to me than anybody living. Anyway, I took him up. We had a grand ride, all afternoon, over four States. Then, making the landing in the field, the propeller broke and we hit the ground wrong. The kid was killed. Broken neck. He died in my arms without the sacraments. I never saw my mother again. They wouldn't let me into the house. Dad wouldn't. I don't think mother ever knew I came. She died that fall. She had been poorly ever since Stephen was born, the kid — that was killed.

"Came to Boston. Got job. Chauffeur for Malcolm Dayton, banker. Eloped with his daughter. We were married by a justice of the peace but Edyth suspected I mightn't feel really married unless a priest blessed us. She looked up the priest of our parish and I went to him. No, hadn't gone to the Funeral Mass for the kid even, and never to confession since the smash. The priest made me ashamed but agreed to get the dispensations. He talked to Edyth and assured himself she was old enough to know her own mind and really wanted to be my wife. She is ten years older than me. So I confessed and was taken back and received communion, and we were married again in the rectory before the housekeeper and janitor. Edyth was to take instruction. I

could have lived alone outside the Church all right, but couldn't have rested easy with my wife outside it. So I was glad Edyth insisted, I guess. Remembered my mother too well! Couldn't imagine the mother of my children not a Catholic!

"Dayton went crazy when we told him. He wrote that he would buy a divorce for Edyth any time she asked him to, but until then to keep away from him. We had a baby the first year. A boy. I got a job selling the new Ajax cars. I thought we were pretty well off, but Edyth didn't. We had a nice apartment and a maid. My mother never had a maid. Edyth's friends stuck to her. They were fine. Some of them I liked a lot. But she was never really mine. Somehow she was her father's girl. The baby was born at the Lying-In. The day they were coming home, I had to give a driving lesson in Arlington, but a girl friend of Edyth's was bringing them and would help the nurse and the maid fix them up comfortably. But I came home and found nobody but the nurse. Called the hospital and they told me that Dayton had come for his daughter and grandson. Called the house. Got Dayton himself. Sorry — can't remember a word he said. But I knew that Edyth and the baby were with him and weren't coming home. And the next day he sent a lawyer around who told me that the old man had had me watched and that they had a clear case for a divorce. They had one framed, all right — but no use going into that. I had not been unfaithful. No, I told

you, I can't remember a single word he said on the 'phone.

"No — I didn't say a word to the nurse who had stood staring at me while I 'phoned. Found I couldn't. But I thought it was because I was crying. The baby and his mother not coming home, you know. Thought it was tears in my throat. I thought so then, I mean. I walked out of the apartment, got into the car, drove all night. At dawn I was back in Boston. I don't remember where I drove or anything about it.

"Yes, I stopped for gasoline once or twice during the night. I held up my fingers to show how many gallons and didn't say a word. But I didn't realize it was because I couldn't speak until I got back to the apartment in the morning. The nurse had slept there and was waiting for her money. Yes, my throat closes up whenever I try to speak. It's like tears — or a sob. Don't like to try any more. No, haven't been to Mass since the Sunday before Edyth and the boy were coming home from the hospital. No — don't want to see a priest. I've lost my faith, I think. No, my family know nothing about me. They won't, either.

"The Ajax people kept me on as a mechanic. It's charity, really. They're as hard hit as all the rest by the depression. They really can't afford a mechanic who can't talk to the people who drive in. The boss sent me to you. I make thirty a week. Can pay you ten. Ten a week goes to the smashed plane debt. If you don't cure

me quickly, I'll disappear. The boss is risking his own job, keeping me on. Yes, the boy is fine. When I saw him at the hospital he looked like my kid brother. The kid would have been his uncle."

There the history proper ended and Janet's typing began. It was a report of the physical condition of the patient. Doctor Pryne had, apparently, passed McCloud on to various specialists. Petra skipped all this. It was technical and dull but as much as she took in appeared to rate McCloud's physical condition as excellent. All the remaining cards in the pile, a dozen or more, written on both sides, in Doctor Pryne's illegible hand, might as well have been inscribed in Chinese for all Petra could read of them. They appeared to record the experiments in treatment Doctor Pryne had tried on the case, and would have been fascinating, Petra thought, if only she could have read three consecutive words.

But one sentence was clear, — and underlined: "*Must find out what Malcolm Dayton said to him on the telephone.*"

As she read this, Petra heard some one breathe. . . . She had not noticed the step in the reception office nor in this room, but she heard the breath, soft as it was. She looked up from the card she was studying and saw Janet. It was the secretary's sharply indrawn breath that had so startled Petra. But when she woke to the expression on her new friend's face, her very blood ran cold. This was not Janet, the intelligent, the kind, the clever Janet. What had happened to her? What was the matter?

"Petra Farwell! What are you doing with those files?"

"Reading about McCloud. I wanted to learn . . ."

But her explanation died stillborn. Suddenly, like a thunderclap, Petra knew what a fool she had been, what a terrible thing she had done. She knew now why Janet looked as if she had come upon a murderer, his hands dripping blood. Petra put her hand up to her mouth. It was dry and her tongue was dry.

Janet said "You are stark crazy — or else you are a plain fool. It isn't just the sneakiness of it — reading private records. It's the cruelty. It's violating another person's rights to his own secrets. Petra, how *could* you? Are you crazy?"

She must be. Petra thought so herself now. It was worse than reading other people's letters, reading a doctor's records of cases. Any one who wasn't crazy would know that. Even young children knew better than to open drawers in other people's houses. She *was* crazy, crazy, crazy! She was ready to die!

"Why weren't the files locked, Miss Frazier? How did this happen? How was it possible?" Doctor Pryne had come in without either of them noticing. His voice was hard — cold too — like ice. There was a white area around his lips.

"You went off with the key, Doctor. You were writing up the Fountain dope. I knew the files weren't locked but I was leaving Miss Farwell in charge, you see. I was gone only a few minutes. I never dreamed that she herself would open the files. How could I?"

The secretary had nothing more to say, nothing more to look. Her face was paper white — white with anger at Petra, at herself, at Doctor Pryne. She went into her own little office and shut the door behind her with something approximating a slam. In another second the racket of an angry typewriter came in from her office by way of the doctor's open windows.

"Better put those cards away now. Are they in their right order?"

Petra looked down from Doctor Pryne's cold face to her hands and what they were all unconsciously still holding. She put the cards back into the drawer with careful quickness. "Yes, they are in their right order." She almost whispered it. Her throat felt thick. Perhaps she was going to lose her speech as McCloud had lost his, or it might be tears.

"Petra! Why *did* you?"

"I wanted to know about this Neil McCloud. I was terribly interested."

"Why?" And then with sudden sick suspicion Lewis asked, "Do you know his wife? Is that why you were interested?"

Petra nodded. "I do know Edyth, of course. She's one of Clare's friends. And I knew her before that, in Cambridge. But I didn't know she was like this — cruel . . ."

"Petra, this is impossible. I simply can't take it in, what you've done!" He was feeling in various pockets

with quick exasperated motions as he spoke, but his eyes had not left her face. "Lord! Miss Frazier was right. Here's the key. That lets her out." He added, "And us in — you and me in deep together. We both ought to go to jail."

Petra exclaimed, "Not you! You couldn't know I might be — abnormally dishonorable. But I haven't told you really why I did it. And you asked. I didn't know McCloud was that McCloud — Edyth's husband. I didn't even think about the names being the same. He came to the office this morning to see you. I said he must wait till to-morrow. Janet said that was a mistake, that you would have seen him. It came to me, while Janet was out at lunch, that if I had known about this case, McCloud's case — as Janet knew about it — I wouldn't have made the mistake. So I walked right in here and looked him up — the way you would in a library, you know, a Who's Who or something. I wanted to be efficient, to understand what it was all about. But I *was* crazy. It was as bad as reading private letters. I see that now. I'm not like Shelley. The heat numbs me. My brains stand still. . . ."

"It looks as if they did!" But then he was sorry. He needn't have said that. But could he believe her in what she had just said? Could he believe that it had not been mere curiosity about the mistaken marriage of a woman she happened to know that had brought Petra to his files? Well, strangely, he did believe her. She had lied,

he supposed, about the book she said she had been reading that afternoon at Green Doors, and he knew she had lied about his keeping her working here after hours. All the same, he believed that she was telling the truth now.

"I wonder what McCloud wanted. Wish I had seen him. Didn't he leave any message?" He would make her forget his anger, which was so quickly passing.

Petra told him what McCloud had written, except for the upside-down sentence. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told you he came, since he asked me particularly not to. But I couldn't have you think it was because I knew Edyth. Curiosity of that sort — well, I wouldn't have felt any temptation. Truly, I wouldn't."

His eyes were studying her face. She went on, "Of course, you will fire me. There's no reason you shouldn't. But since it was you who made my stepmother cut my allowance in two, you ought to persuade her to give it back again — if I'm not to have this job now. Will you do that?"

She stopped, waiting for him to answer. But he said nothing, merely continued to look at her, while his expression changed. It was ice again. With the instinct to justify herself she stammered, "I told you — I *told you* — at the guest house — Saturday — that it was a *salary* Clare paid me, not an allowance. I know that she said it wasn't so — that very night — that you heard her. But why should you believe her more than me? Anyway, I must have that thousand again. It is your fault I lost it."

"But don't you want to keep this job?" Lewis asked.

He was beginning to admit to himself, at last, that Petra Farwell was beyond him. He simply did not understand her.

"Yes. I do want to keep it. Very much. But how can I — after this?"

"I think it would be much better to keep it and make a success of it than — than go back to the twenty-four-hour-a-day stepdaughter job. Don't you?"

Petra nodded. She had a voice but she did not trust it.

"Easier, even?"

Again she nodded.

"Well, you're a great help to Miss Frazier. She says so."

"She won't now." She *sounded* all right. You couldn't hear a tear.

"Oh, yes, I think she will. She was angry with herself just now, more than with you, I imagine. Just as I was — with myself, I mean. Am still, as a matter of fact. Miss Frazier realized that she should have warned you about the privacy of the files and I knew that it was very nearly criminal of me to leave the files unlocked while I was out. So we've all had a miserable time of it. Did you look at anything besides McCloud's history, by the way?"

"No."

"All right. If you'll only wait a little this afternoon till I'm free, Petra, I'd like the pleasure of driving you out to Meadowbrook. I want you to finish about Teresa. Of course, you know that."

"Dick's driving me out." But as Petra saw Doctor Pryne's disappointment, she said quickly almost the precise words she had said earlier to Dick, "But it wouldn't pay you, anyway, even if he wasn't. Clare is giving a big dinner party to-night and she'll be busy seeing to things. She does the flowers herself, cuts them and everything. It takes simply hours."

"Good Lord! What has Mrs. Farwell's cutting the flowers to do with it? It is you I want to talk to. When will you finish about Teresa, then? You said when we were alone next. And will you take me to see her? I have been looking forward to seeing her again ever since our talk — at the guest house."

Lewis saw the look of deviousness creep over Petra's face then, and he knew, almost certainly, that whatever she said next would have no reality in it. She was baffling to exasperation.

"I'll take you to see Teresa if she invites you. But there's nothing more to tell you, really. Only I beg you not to mention her to Clare again, not to tell her any more of all that I told you. I don't know how much you did tell her. She hasn't said a word about it and I haven't asked. But you won't again, will you?"

"My dear! That was a stupid slip I made. I broke my promise of secrecy. But why should I talk about anything with Mrs. Farwell? It is you I am trying to talk with — and you put me off. You don't say anything *true* to me any more."

"What do you want to know? About Teresa, I mean? I've told you the absolute truth about her."

"Yes, I know that — as far as it went. But I want the rest, all of it!" Lewis exclaimed. "What Teresa did next. You said she was ready to become a secretary and something happened. I want to know what happened, what she is doing now, how things are with her. I've been waiting days."

But even before Petra opened her lips, Lewis gave up hope of her answering him truly. He saw her choosing between several possible answers. And when she said, deliberately, very carefully, "Teresa got her chance to go to college. She supports herself by dress-designing. She's all right, thank you," Lewis knew that while these might be facts, they weren't the truth; they left him exactly where he had been left Saturday. He knew not one real thing more. The swordlike reticence in Petra's gentian eyes guarded her against his knowing now every bit as effectively as against Clare's, her father's, and Dick's. But Dick! Saturday Dick had seemed to stand with Clare and Farwell over against Petra's guard. But had that, perhaps, changed? Certainly he was very much in evidence — lunching with Petra to-day, driving her out to-night. Lewis himself had been away four days. Anything could have happened in four days. Had Dick waked up, come to his senses?

"There's your telephone," he said then. "It's been ringing some time. Miss Frazier can't hear it with her

door shut and typing like that. You'd better see to it. It's your job."

Petra flew to her desk, shutting the doctor's door softly, on the wing. The one thought she took with her, and it was utterly comforting, in spite of the tears in her throat, was that she still had a job.



Chapter Thirteen

SATURDAY NOON LEWIS CAME NEAR HAVING A SCENE WITH his secretary, when he insisted that, for once, she must take the half holiday. "No, you cannot have the next chapter." He felt rather like an ugly dog barking up at her, with his paws on a bone — the bone his manuscript. "I've got to keep it to revise. I fumbled it terribly last night. Couldn't seem to concentrate. You get along out to some beach or other. Lie in the sun. You're white as a daisy. Good-by and thanks."

There had been strife; but Lewis, continuing to ape the behavior of a dog with his bone, and doing it rather successfully, had finally won and Miss Frazier went for her hat and bag. But she came back in a second to explain, "Petra is staying to practice typing. Won't it disturb you if you're working here? Mr. Wilder is coming for her at four. She wants to wait for him."

"What! Again?" But Lewis pulled himself up. He said in answer to her question, "I don't think it'll disturb me. That door is very nearly soundproof."

"I want to tell you that she is broken-hearted about

yesterday, Doctor. She can't get over it. Nothing like that will ever happen again, I know. She's awfully silly in some ways but she's — she's all right. Really she is."

"Yes, I know she is." But Lewis looked up with quick gratitude at his secretary. She was rather all right herself, he was thinking. He smiled at her. It was a more human, a more personal smile than she had ever had from her employer before. She smiled, dimly, back. She was silly herself, a thousand times sillier than Petra. If Doctor Pryne saw that she was fighting tears, he would think she had gone out of her head. She turned quickly away.

In the reception office Janet said to Petra, "The door's soundproof. Doctor Pryne mightn't even know you are staying if I hadn't told him. But it's a long time till four. Don't work too hard. I'll meet you Sunday at twelve."

Petra answered, her hands suspended over the typewriter keys, "I love it, Janet. I love typing. You're going to be proud of me some day. I'll be as good a secretary as you are. To-morrow at noon, yes. How nice it will be!"

That was at two. At three-thirty Lewis put the manuscript chapter into his brief-case and got up, stretching. He lit a cigarette, turned to the window and stood looking out for a minute. Then he took a few quick paces back and forth between the windows and the reception-office door. Then he pushed the patients' easy chair from its usual position till its back was at the window for what-

ever breeze there was. Dick was coming for Petra at four. Lewis himself expected McCloud at the same time. Well, this was only half-past three. He opened the door into his reception office.

Petra was working at shorthand now, her typewriter covered up until Monday. One hand was in her curls, ruffling them, and she appeared to be eating the rubber end of her pencil. She looked at Lewis dazedly. She was white with the heat in the stuffy little room. The doors should all have been opened — or else she shouldn't have stayed. It was not quite so warm as yesterday, but it was bad enough.

"There's a breeze in my office," Lewis said. "A baby one, but rather nice. Put away the lessons, do, and come along in. I'm going to lay off too — till four."

The violet of her frock, was cool against the dark leather of the patients' chair. Why did she wear a yellow belt? Her thin stockings were yellow, gold-yellow. Yellow and violet, with her gentian eyes, and vital gold-brown curls brushed on her neck, back from her ears, made Petra too lovely to look at with a level gaze. Why shouldn't Petra care hugely about clothes and spend all the dollars a year on them she could lay her hands on — if clothes did this! The yellow belt was magic — a narrow yellow magic made of nothing in the world but a silly, twisted bit of silk cord.

Hundreds of women had sat in that chair facing Lewis, for years past, and at no other time could he recall noticing what one of them had worn. But he could no

more help noticing this violet, cool frock of Petra's with the yellow belt than he could help noticing the texture of flowers near at hand. The loveliness of Petra's frocks was as inescapable as the loveliness of flowers.

He offered her a cigarette. She took one but only, he felt, because she did not see what they were going to talk about and this was something to relieve the awkwardness. . . . This time, when he held the match for her, their eyes did not meet. . . .

Lewis put his arm along his desk. First of all, he had a duty to perform. He should have done it yesterday had he not taken it for granted it was unnecessary. But in the middle of the night he had been bothered by that taking for granted. Now was the time to get it off his mind, — and pray heaven it was not too late.

"You're not to mind what I'm going to say, Petra. Probably it's totally unnecessary. But you will give me your promise now, won't you, quite solemnly, never so long as you live, to tell any one — any one at all — anything that you learned about my patient McCloud yesterday. You haven't mentioned any of it to a soul, have you?"

Petra looked at him. No faltering now. Truth was on the way. She said almost before he had finished, "No, of course I haven't told a soul and of course I promise. I do understand and you can trust me." But even as she finished, panic came. She put her hand to her mouth. She had remembered something. Lewis *saw* her remember.

His heart sank. This was too bad — too terribly too

bad. He exclaimed, "You have told some one, Petra. Who? In God's name!"

"No, — no, I haven't —" But she stopped the lie. She couldn't lie to this man. In the first place, he could spot it. In the second place, she did not want to, somehow. She said, miserably, "I told Teresa. I told her every word. I'd forgotten. But that doesn't count as telling. It's like telling one's self. She is so safe. . . . I told her that McCloud was Edyth's husband. She had known her in Cambridge. And all about the flying accident. I told her that. And his mother's dying. I told her, too, how McCloud had only seen his baby at the hospital. Less than two weeks. That seemed so unjust — so cruel! Oh, yes, I guess I told Teresa everything. You see — You see, *I thought she might help.*"

"Petra! You are terrible!" Lewis groaned. "You're impossible!"

But Petra seemed not to mind his consternation. She was looking past Lewis' head, a question in her eyes. Lewis swung around and there was Neil McCloud himself, standing midway in the room — his expression murderous.

McCloud was early for his appointment and had expected to be kept waiting until four at least. But when he found the reception room deserted and the doctor's door wide open, he naturally came to it. It had taken him some seconds to take it in — what was going on here — that the man he had entrusted with his confidences as implicitly as if he had been a priest in the

confessional was using those confidences as a peg on which to hang a flirtation with a beautiful new secretary. They sat here in the place where he had written it all, hashing it over together. Telling his secrets. . . . As Edyth had hashed over things with her father, old man Dayton, telling his secrets. . . . Terrible secrets. . . .

For in this moment he remembered what Pryne had so long wanted him to remember! Pryne had questioned and questioned. Coaxed at his strangely blank memory. And nothing doing. But now it was here. Clear, bright as a lightning flash. Now, when remembering was no good to anybody! What the old man had said, over the telephone, when McCloud had called him up that night to ask him what he had done with Edyth and their son, was this:

"Edyth has told me everything. You killed your brother. You broke your mother's heart. But you shan't break my daughter's heart and ruin my grandson's life. I have the power to protect my own. There isn't anything you can say. *Don't say a word.*"

And you had been obedient. You had gone dumb from that minute. In obedience to Edyth's father, who knew that you had killed your brother and broken your mother's heart. Edyth had told him all that. Told the old man. All the things you had told her before you would marry her, in sacred confidence. And now the old man was shouting at you through the telephone. It was as if no time had passed since. As if you were hearing it this minute, while you stood frozenly staring at Pryne and

his stenographer: "There isn't anything you can say. Don't say a word."

Let the old brute shout! Keep on shouting through your brain! You don't mind it now. At least this one thing about you, Pryne shouldn't ever possess. One little bit he wouldn't tell his beautiful stenographer — simply because he wouldn't ever know it. And now you'd get out, — right out into the darkness which had been compassing you ever since the moment the kid went out in your arms.

Pryne was getting up. The girl was up too. Why didn't your hate and scorn blast them where they stood? It was strong enough to do that. But hate failing, there was the revolver. No! Shut up. Don't think of that. The kid — Mother — those were lives enough for you to have destroyed. Two — three steps, and you would follow those beloveds into the dark void. You should have followed before. But instead you had come whining for help to this — fashionable psychiatrist. Hell! Your teeth were clenched with the will it took not to put your hand to the pocket holding the revolver. It was essential that you should be outside the door, that it should be between you and them, or Pryne might somehow manage to spoil it. The doctor had a look in his eyes — as if he suspected or even knew your intention. But you weren't even touching your pocket. Your hands were at your sides. Straight down. How could Pryne know what you were going to do?

Well, Pryne wouldn't move, wouldn't interfere, you

were sure of it, as long as you kept your eyes steady and your hands at your sides. You started backing toward the door, holding the skunk where he was with your scorn of him, and his girl beside him there, wide-eyed and scared. She was a damned beauty. You had been right when you told her so. You would back through the door. They should not stir. Then you would close it with one lightning motion. But you must remember to use the left hand. The right must be kept for the business of shooting your brains out before either of them could stir. It would be a neat job. That was one thing they should never hash over together, — your *attempted* suicide. Attempted! Like hell, attempted! You'd have one clean mark for that, so help you Christ.

At that moment McCloud's seeking heel felt the rise of the doorsill, the rim of the dark void.



Chapter Fourteen

ON WEDNESDAY NEIL MCCLOUD HAD LOST HIS JOB OF mechanic for the Ajax people. At least the top boss had come along and Neil had surmised from the dark looks he cast in his direction, as he spoke in a confidentially low tone to Neil's boss, that he was ragging him for keeping on such a handicapped man when there were hundreds of good men to choose from. So Neil had gone up, as soon as the fellow had left, and discharged himself. His boss had a wife and small children. Nobody's position was any too secure these days. And the top boss had had a very nasty look in his eye not only for Neil, but for Neil's benefactor. Neil had quaked under it. But not for himself. So he walked out of the place, just another fellow out of a job.

A week ago, he had done a rash thing. One of the friends of his married days — still, supposedly, a friend of Edyth's — had seen him in crowded Summer Street, rushed up to him and said that she must have some money. Her husband had failed to meet her with it as he had promised, her bags were waiting in the South

Station for a week-end she was spending on the Cape with friends, Neil must give her every cent he had on him and probably that wouldn't be enough! But would he hurry! He *had* hurried. He pulled his roll from his pocket — Saturday was pay day — and pushed it into pretty, smart Joyce Clayton's yawning snakeskin purse. His only thought during the act was gratitude that the woman was in such a tearing hurry that she seemed not to notice his wordlessness. It was his pride that none of that crowd should know how things were with him, and until this meeting with Joyce, success had seemed childishly easy; they hadn't bothered. But as Joyce had rolled off in the taxi into which he had put her silent — and she not noticing his wordlessness — she had leaned out and called back, "Your address, Neil darling! For heaven's sake, what is it? I'll send a check to-morrow." He had smiled, raised his hat and blotted himself out from her eyes in the crowds of Summer Street. When he discovered that he hadn't even any loose change in his pocket and must walk back to his room supperless and even put off breakfast until he could borrow at the works on next week's salary, he was not much concerned. He had some chocolate in his room and plenty of cigarettes. The chocolate served for supper and breakfast, and the few dollars he let himself borrow on Monday kept him fed until Wednesday, when — instead of asking for more — he walked out penniless an hour after getting to the garage. There would be no more wages to ask an advance on.

He walked over to the Common and sat on a bench all morning, doing what he described to himself as face the situation. But every little while he stopped looking into the ugly face of his predicament and tried to speak. If he could only even whisper! He tried to say his own name. He tried it dozens of times but the only result was the ghost of a sob.

When the noon bells and whistles sounded he came, before they ceased, to a determination. He would look for work — yes — go into machine shops and garages with pencil and pad in his hand, and offer his services. He would face down all the curiosity and jeers that would come to him for his inability to speak. He would scour Boston for any sort of job where speech was not essential. But he would not go to any one to borrow money for food. If he got a job, O.K. If not, starving would be a natural way out and nobody, not even his guardian angel, could call it suicide.

Neil had followed what seemed to him this fair plan with action. Hungry, he had job-hunted steadily, until Friday morning. Friday morning, in the pursuit of the impossible job, he had stumbled, in a dirty alley, on a little abandoned paper bag half full of peanuts. Yes, it seemed too good to be true; and indeed he was by this time in such a giddy state that it might very easily be illusion. He had not been sure it wasn't, until he had them in his teeth. Then, as he threw the bag from him, empty, Neil remembered that to-morrow his room rent would be due. But something else about Saturday was

important too. After some groping he remembered — an appointment with Doctor Pryne.

Doctor Pryne! The handful of peanuts seemed only to have increased his hunger. Good luck, stumbled upon so astonishingly, had weakened his will, he thought; but anyway, he would ask Doctor Pryne for the loan of a dollar. Then he would buy himself food. He would go now and get the money. With meat and coffee to back him up, the Saturday's séance must work — *Doctor Pryne must cure him*. Anyway, it would be Neil's last shot before letting himself starve. There was some chance it might work. Pryne was always holding out hope — always seemed expectant of the thing's breaking. But even if it didn't work, and the cure didn't come through on Saturday, and consequently he never got another job, and starved, and so never paid back that dollar, — *Pryne was a good fellow*. Neil would rather be owing Doctor Lewis Pryne a dollar through eternity than any other soul he knew. He'd give himself that one more chance.

So he had walked the miles up to the doctor's office on the strength of the peanuts. And a new girl in the reception office — only she looked like something in a fairy tale, and almost as illusory as the peanuts — had said Pryne couldn't possibly see him till his appointment the next day.

What he had done between then and his return just now a little ahead of his appointment time, Neil could not have told — or written. The one thing he knew, knew constantly, was that he had not eaten.

Now as his groping heel found the rim of the dark, and his left hand reached for the door knob, Neil was grateful that after all he had not seen Doctor Pryne yesterday. Now, as it was, he would be taking no debt to this man over the ultimate doorsill; for, in this moment of confusion, the hours the doctor had spent on him, for which he could never now send a bill, did not loom as debt in the young man's aching brain.

His fingers had the door knob. It was cold and they were hot. Neil exulted in the knowledge that one movement of his arm, and this door would go shut forever and ever between himself and Doctor Lewis Pryne — Doctor Lewis Pryne who had let him down to a girl with a fairy-tale face in a violet dress with a yellow belt. . . .

If it had been Lewis who had moved and spoken, the door would have slammed then and the revolver roared. But it was Petra. To Neil's shaking vision the fairy-tale face was flaming — unbelievably — to a white flame of angelicness — was becoming an angel's face, against which no door could shut. The blue eyes were swords. The violet, the yellow were gone, and all her clothing was winged white fire. Fear that was awe and awe that was fear paralyzed him. She — white fire — was coming upon him —

Lewis had put out a hand to drag her back. But to that hand Petra was not spirit nor flame. She was solid young muscular strength, breaking loose from his clutch. Before he had got around the desk, she had reached the

boy, her arms were around his neck, her face lifted to his, which did not bend to it — only the eyelids were dropped so that he still saw her angelic fire.

"Neil McCloud, you've got it all wrong. Doctor Pryne forgot to lock his files and I came snooping in here and read your cards. That's why you've found us talking about you. Doctor Pryne is ready to *kill* me for it. And I ought to be killed. But the friend I told — she will keep your secrets. Truly she will. Or she will tell them only in her prayers! It is the Little Flower she is especially telling. She is offering a novena to her for you — a novena to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Do you know the Little Flower? Teresa, she has the Little Flower's name herself, you see — wants you to say 'I love.' She said last night, 'Love is the Word. He must say that.' She asked the Little Flower to help you say it. Say it now — Neil McCloud. Try to say, *I love*."

Lewis was close to them. Petra was wild, mad. But no madder than McCloud. If the boy lifted a hand, Lewis was ready. He had guessed about the revolver. He would snatch Petra back, get between them, if the man moved a finger. Then a strange thing happened. Up in McCloud's face, Petra's face seemed to be reflected — or rather a flame, a flame burning to whiteness that couldn't be Petra, after all. It was an unearthly wing of light. McCloud put his hands up to Petra's hands that were clasped on the back of his neck — but Lewis did not stir — and took them down; but he kept them,

as if he did not know he had them still. He was not even looking at Petra now — but beyond her.

Neil said, "The Little Flower? Yes, of course, I know her. The kid had a special devotion to her. Mother had too. The kid thought he saw her — his First Communion morning. In his room. By the washstand. Mother believed him. She had an idea he might be a priest some day. But he won't grow up now. He's dead. The little fellow is dead. . . . How does the Little Flower feel about that — my killing him?"

"You didn't kill him. It was a fault, not a sin, when you took him flying. Teresa says so. But see! The Little Flower has cured you, no matter how she feels. She has answered Teresa's prayers. . . . Even without your saying 'I love'! Your speech is perfect — you have spoken."

Until Petra called his attention to it, Neil had not known that he had spoken. But it was true. His voice still hung in the room — he heard it now in echo — the warm, unstrained voice of young manhood. It was his own voice! . . .

He let Petra's hands go then. He backed up against the door jamb to his full exultant young height. His face was rolling with tears, but it could not be called crying. There was no grimace of the features and his eyes were wide open. His hands were at his side. He spoke again: "I love. My God, I do love. I love You, my Lord and my God. Have mercy on me, a sinner."



Chapter Fifteen

THE ELEVATOR FOR WHICH LEWIS HAD RUNG BROUGHT Dick Wilder up with it. Until he saw him there, Lewis had totally forgotten that he would be coming along about now to keep his date with Petra.

"See here," he exclaimed, taking Dick's arm and pushing him back into the elevator cage ahead of himself. "Come on down with me. I'll explain in the street. Petra's busy just now and can't possibly get away." And by the time they had walked out through the lower hall, come to the sidewalk and crossed to the curb where Dick's car was parked, Lewis had decided how much — how little, rather — he would tell Dick.

"Petra's doing something very special for me," he said. "Helping with a patient. Interruption would spoil the whole thing. You'd better wait here in your car till she comes down. I'll stick around with you for a few minutes, if you'll have me; then I must get back and see what she's accomplished."

"But how long will she be?" Dick asked, puzzled. "Not long, I hope. We're a little late already. Feather-

stone kept me, talking over a commission that came in this morning."

"Yes? Well, Petra mayn't be able to leave for half an hour or so. But does it matter?"

"Oh, but see here, Lewis! She can't be half an hour — or anything like it. God! Do you expect me just to sit here in this heat?"

"Shut up!" Lewis' anger blazed. It was too soon after that other voice, McCloud's, new-found, racked with love, had uttered the Name — and Lewis could not bear it. But after all, Dick had not been there. He could not know how shocking was the sound of his casual expletive.

So, quickly contrite for the injustice of his anger, Lewis exclaimed, "I'm sorry. I'm edgy, I think. It is blistering, isn't it?" Lewis was decidedly not edgy and moreover, for some time now, ever since he had invited Petra out of the reception office to sit in the patients' chair, facing him, he had not been aware of the heat. But it was the only explanation of his mood he cared to trust Dick with, at the moment. And his friend accepted it as reasonable.

"Oh, that's all right." Dick turned off Lewis' apology, embarrassed, then added quickly, "But look here. I'm taking the Farwell family to the Meadowbrook Country Club for dinner. And there's a tea party at Green Doors first. Very special! In honor of little Sophia's second birthday. Her grandmother is coming — Clare's mother. No one else. Clare's counting on Petra, of course. Why,

she'll be terribly disappointed if I don't get Petra there in the shortest possible time now. Do you see?"

Lewis did see, perfectly. Again Petra was to be forced into the role of baby-snubber. Only this time it was his, Lewis', fault.

"Too bad," he said. "A pity. But what Petra is doing now is even more important than two-year-old birthday parties. Take my deepest apologies to Mrs. Farwell, will you please, and tell her that I was tiresome and unreasonable and that Petra had nothing to say about it. Do that and I'll drive her out myself — get her there in time for your dinner at the latest. I promise."

"Well, Lewis, old-timer, I can only say that it seems to me you're taking a funny way to help Petra learn how to treat Clare. I don't see how anything can be quite so important as you're making this out to be. Really! If Clare forgives you, she's an angel. But she will, of course. She *is* an angel."

"That's reassuring. But seriously, Dick, it's none of my business how Petra treats her stepmother. Thought I'd made that plain. As a matter of fact, though, and just from the outside, she seems to me to be playing her part at Green Doors rather well. — If you aren't going to wait, you'd better get along and explain, hadn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I had. Clare can't keep little Sophia up, of course. Somebody must be there before the cake and the candles to explain about Petra and help make a party. But be sure to get her out in time to dress for

dinner, won't you! Where will you dine yourself, Lewis? At the Allens'?"

"Perhaps. It doesn't matter. . . . Cynthia'll think I have a Meadowbrook complex for sure, if I turn up three times within the week!"

The last was spoken to himself as he stood on the curb, watching Dick's car nose out and creep away in the traffic. Lewis would give Petra and McCloud another ten minutes before returning to his office. He went across to the Public Garden in the hope of finding an empty bench where he could smoke while waiting that ten minutes. But he wondered, as he went, what Dick would have thought, could he know how Lewis had left Petra occupied up there, — if he could see her, as Lewis had seen her from the door before he closed it softly. Dick would, of course, think him quite mad. But he was not mad. Lewis knew himself as sane — and as collected — as he had ever been in his life.

McCloud, after his declaration of love, had walked past Petra and Lewis, not seeing them any more, and dropped on his knees by the patients' chair. There he had put his head down in his folded arms on the leather cushion. Lewis himself had stayed where he was, inert and doubtful of what to do. As a psychiatrist, he had no cue for further action. But Petra felt no hesitation. She did not even so much as glance at Lewis for approval of her intention when she quickly followed McCloud, and quietly seating herself on the arm of the patients' chair,

put her hand down on his dark head. After that, there was no sound or motion in the place.

. . . Petra's eyes met Lewis' through the stillness. He smiled his slight, fleeting smile — a smile that declared both his gravity and his comprehension. Then he got out of there, leaving Petra alone with McCloud, as quietly as he could. McCloud, when he returned to common day, had better find himself with Petra than with a psychiatrist. It was his best chance — Lewis was certain — of hanging on to the liberty he had regained, over the first minutes of difficult adjustments.

Lewis found his vacant bench in the garden and lit a cigarette. A squirrel, boldest and most insensitive of all animals to the moods of humans, came rollicking up to his feet. A motion picture of a squirrel's gyrations, slowed down, ought to be excitingly beautiful. Lewis had long intended to buy a moving-picture camera for the one purpose of taking organic life in motion, — flowers opening, horses trotting, unconscious children playing. But so far he had not had the price, — not been willing to give it, anyhow. At this very minute the clinic was in crying need of a new ceiling. If he didn't scare up the money for that and set them to work on it, the plaster would be coming down on people's heads. You couldn't wait for the hospital trustees to get around to vote the money. The psychological effect of such dinginess was bad for the patients too. . . .

The Little Flower! Saint Thérèse of Lisieux! It was precisely as if a friend of some of Lewis' best friends had

stepped in between him and his patient this afternoon, curing the patient. For the Little Flower was no far-off legend-enshrouded figure in Christian myth. She was of modern times. She had died, in fact, a girl then of twenty-five, only half a dozen years before Lewis was born. His mother's contemporary! And in dying she had asked the privilege of spending her heaven doing good upon earth; and since then countless miracles had been credited to her interventions. Joseph Duffield, Lewis' one greatest friend, had had, during the last few years of his life, what he in his Catholic terminology called a special devotion to this particular saint. Joseph had died, as it happened, midway in a novena he and his wife were making to the Little Flower for the cure of his angina. Strangely, her husband's death and the unhealing grief it had brought her had not shaken Laura Duffield's faith in the Little Flower's loving goodness. There was even now a framed picture of the Little Flower on the bookcase in Laura's bedroom where she had moved Michael when he fell so ill. Lewis had often looked across the suffering, paralyzed little form during his long watches this past week, and himself taken heart from the pure smiling face of the young saint.

Michael, too, knew Thérèse and loved Thérèse best after Mary and Joseph of all the saints his grandmother had taught him to reverence. The boy had told Lewis that first night he spent with him in his rooms, that he had begged the Little Flower — begged her over and over — to make his grandmother well again, right up

until his separation from her at the clinic that afternoon. And when that did not happen, Michael had gone on praying and loving Thérèse all the same, as soon as the first spasm of homesickness passed a little. Laura Duffield, when Lewis had remarked on this persistence of the boy's faith in this particular saint, had smilingly said that to her mind that was one of the Little Flower's favorite miracles, preserving and even increasing faith in the hearts whose dearest desires she could not, in God's mercy, answer. . . . It was the miracle beyond miracles, Laura had said, this increased love and faith in the face of denial. Didn't Lewis himself see that?

The squirrel was now actually on Lewis' knee, begging with nose and paws and eyes for nuts. But Lewis looked through the avid little beggar as through a bit of glass. Shock of some sort — he had made up his mind to that weeks ago, hadn't he! — was the best hope of restoring McCloud's speech. The only question had been how to procure a shock that would not be calamitous. Well, this afternoon, McCloud had had his shock. Two of them, in fact, one right on top of the other. First, the most violent sort of anger at finding his doctor betraying his confidences. Second, Petra's reminding him with such unexpected suddenness of the Little Flower — a person intimately connected with the brother for whose death McCloud held himself responsible. It was possible even that "the kid" had spoken Saint Thérèse's name while dying. In any case this afternoon had shown that she

was all bound up with memories of "the kid" in McCloud's tortured mind. So there were the two shocks, either one of which might easily account for the cure. Lewis admitted the possibilities. But all the same, he was not convinced of the rational explanation. Nor was he exactly convinced of the supernatural explanation. He simply felt no compulsion to decide between them. Who was he, to dare to say!

One thing only was certain. The McCloud records should be abstracted from the files at once and burned; for no psychiatric theories, no pages for a new book, would ever be forthcoming from this particular case. That was Lewis' only certainty.

The squirrel sprang away as Lewis got up. The ten minutes he had given Petra and McCloud alone together must be up. He threw away his cigarette and went back to the office building.

The door into his reception room was locked. That was surprising. Lewis remembered, distinctly, that the latch had been off when he came out. It was always off, in fact, until the place was finally shut up for the day. He got out his latchkey, wondering.

The rooms were deserted. No Petra. No McCloud. They had both gone. But surely Petra had interpreted Lewis' final look at her before he closed the door to mean he would be back almost at once. She must have known he would want to keep McCloud in his care for the next few hours. Why, he had left his hat there on the desk even, and his papers lay scattered. Petra could

see, if she couldn't reason, that he was coming back.

He looked his desk over, thinking she might have left a note of explanation for him. But she had not even done that. Then Lewis thought he understood. She must suddenly have realized that Dick was very late, called the architect's office, found that Dick had left it some time ago, decided that he was not, after all, coming for her, and dashed for a train. But where would McCloud have gone off to, so quickly, without a word, or a note? His room, most likely. Quickly Lewis looked up the address. There was a telephone number, but Lewis dared not submit the stability of the young man's cure to such a drastic test. So he started off in search.

A little after seven o'clock Lewis was back in his own rooms in the apartment hotel where he lived. He had waited in his car outside McCloud's rooming house for something over an hour, watching for McCloud's return, after first making sure he was not already at home. Then he had dined in anxious solitude in a humble restaurant and now he was here to telephone Green Doors. He got Dick, but only to discover that Petra had not come on the train, hadn't showed up at all.

"But you promised to bring her yourself, I thought! We've been waiting. Clare was delighted. She wants you to join our party at the Club. She called your office the minute I told her your plan about driving Petra out. But nobody answered. How do I know where Petra is, if you don't?"

Lewis explained — but it sounded stupid in his own ears — that he and Petra had missed each other somehow and she had never learned that he *was* driving her out to Meadowbrook. She must have taken a train. Please would Dick have her call Lewis at his rooms here the minute she came. It was important. Yes, Lewis would wait in for the call.

After that, there was nothing Lewis could do but wait and try to read, or work on the book. He would read. He wished he had installed an electric fan this summer. It had been the expense, again, that had deterred him. But this was a most oppressive variety of heat. Not a breath. Extraordinary. You didn't often get nights like this so close to the Atlantic. A good thing he hadn't let Cynthia hang curtains at his windows. Every particle of air that could come in was here in his curtainless rooms. Lewis took "Phantastes" down from his bookshelves and settled into a chair against one of the windows to read. He had hesitated between "Phantastes" and "Saint Augustine's Confessions," and finally chosen the former. His recent talk with Cynthia on the subject of Petra was the deciding factor.

Eight. Half-past eight. Quarter to nine. Dick must have forgotten to tell Petra to call, that was all. They would be just about finishing dinner at the Club now. Lewis would make himself wait until nine, to make certain not to interrupt Dick's dinner party, and then call.

This time he asked for Miss Farwell herself, but if she

was not there then Mr. Richard Wilder. It was Dick who came, and with promptness. "Yes, just finished dinner. I was right here by the boxes, going to call you. Petra hasn't showed up. Clare wants to speak to you."

"Doctor Pryne? Good evening. I'm really rather anxious, you know. What's become of Petra? Where is she? Dick doesn't seem to have got it quite straight."

If Clare knew Teresa Kerr's whereabouts, Lewis would have asked her for the address then and there, in spite of the taboo Petra had imposed on mentioning Teresa to anybody at Green Doors, for of course it had occurred to him that Petra must have taken McCloud to see Teresa. If she was living in Boston. It was she, Teresa, who had prayed for his cure to Saint Thérèse. It was she who had understood that McCloud could say "I love." But Clare, Lewis was sure, knew nothing of Teresa Kerr's present existence. So he merely said, "The whole thing is due to my stupidity. We missed somehow, Petra and I. But I am sure she is all right, that there's nothing to worry about. Only please ask her to call me the minute she does turn up, will you. I am waiting in to talk with her. Here at my rooms. Thanks so much."

Lewis had been sincere in his assurances to Clare that Petra was all right and that there was no cause for anxiety on the part of her stepmother. Lewis' only real anxiety at that time was about McCloud. He wanted to know whether the cure had lasted; and it seemed hard, having merely to sit here and wait for that information until Petra called him up. He grew more certain as the

evening wore on that she had taken him to Teresa and that they were there now. The McCloud business had simply put Green Doors and all her social obligations right out of Petra's mind. You could not wonder at that. Lewis' own mind had had room for nothing else since, in spite of his pretended reading of many pages, already thrice familiar, of George MacDonald's "Phantastes."

He gave up even the pretense of reading now and started pacing his sitting room. It was a large, long, low room, almost bare of furniture. The partitions joining three rooms had been knocked out to make it. The two things Lewis demanded of his living quarters were spaciousness and absence of unessentials. So this sitting room of his — to which he had let Cynthia do nothing — was rather like a very large, beautifully proportioned cell, — except for a grand piano at one end set between corner windows. This was a beautiful rosewood instrument, beautiful in itself as a vase of flowers or a fire on a hearth. And it was heaped with stacks of musical scores. Lewis read music for diversion as other people read books. Sometimes he played to his reading — ghostlily, for his mind alone. But whether his hands gave him back the sounds he read as ghostly echo or not, he usually did his music-reading sitting at the piano as if he were playing. The instrument itself, even when he was not touching the keys, seemed in some inexplicable way to enrich his comprehension of the scores. Bach and Brahms were the masters he consorted with most, but he often turned to César Franck as well, and understood him.

Above the piano between the windows, Lewis had hung a picture, framed in narrow black wood. It was about a foot square, no more, and the only picture in the room. Three trees, done in ordinary pencil. The first impression was of meaning and beauty. The lines of the trees and the grasses at their roots flowed upward with an ineffable sweep of freedom. Even the trunks were fluid. That was the first strong impression. But if one looked again, came nearer, one was surprised at oneself for having seen it as full of meaning because now one guessed that here was but another modernistic performance, seemingly careless, yet (if one was given the grace to understand it) tremendously sophisticated — a production of the very latest moderns. Then if one stayed on there, trying to regain one's first genuine thrilling response to loveliness, one saw better: now the upward fluid sweep of the trees' living lines was pure unaffected copying of what some fresh, pure vision had seen. A child! It was a child's drawing.

It was, indeed, one of little Michael Duffield's drawings. If Michael kept this way of *seeing* (for that was what his drawing was now, pure *seeing*) through the rapids of adolescence, where so much is torn apart and swept away as well as so much gathered together and added to in the make-up of the psyche, Michael would be one of the masters. A great artist. Lewis was certain of it. Meanwhile, this one drawing was enough for Lewis to possess, of the hundreds Laura Duffield so carefully cherished. When the piano was silent and the musical

scores were put away, it filled the room for him with perpetual music.

Lewis stopped his pacing. What sense was there in all this miserable anxiety, when trees rose up out of the earth, like that, fluid, peace in their flowing boughs! He went to the piano bench — opened Brahms' Rhapsody in G-minor — smoked and read, read and smoked.

It was after midnight when the telephone rang in the bedroom. He was there almost before the second ring had started, sitting on his bed, lifting the instrument from the table by the pillow. He knew it must be Petra. "Yes, yes," he said. "Lewis speaking." Not Doctor Pryne. At midnight, after two hours with Brahms, one's surname is a thing of peculiar unreality, impossible to speak seriously. Hence his "Lewis speaking." But there was silence on the wire. For a breath there came no response to his announcement of baptismal selfhood. So he spoke again, with an almost fantastic presumption, into the night at large, "Petra! Are you there. . . . Petra?"



Chapter Sixteen

OUT OF THE DARK, OUT OF THE INVISIBLE, LEWIS GOT HIS response: "Yes, this is Petra. I hope you hadn't gone to sleep. They said you wanted me to call you. I'm sorry it's so late."

"That's all right. No, I'm still up. But look here, Petra, of course I want to know about McCloud. What you did with him. How he is." And then Lewis could not help adding to that, "Petra, have you only just got home?"

Again the brief silence. Because of the hour, the stillness, and all the Brahms in which Lewis was steeped, the stillness on the wire took on the proportions of a cosmic stillness. Or was she only hesitating between fabrication and fabrication — between stories to tell him? If he could only see her face, he would know.

Finally, "Yes, I've just come in. Clare waited up for me. I'd forgotten to telephone her, you see; I put it off, and then forgot it. I worried them, I guess. But it was Neil — made me forget. Yes, he is all right. He was starving, Doctor Pryne. Friday, when he came to the

office, he was starving. He lost his job early in the week. He came Friday to borrow a dollar for food. Teresa and I have been feeding him up. He's coming around tomorrow to talk with you, at your hotel, at ten o'clock. . . . Is that all right?"

She had paused before the question, — afraid, apparently, that she might a second time have made a mistake. Lewis was appalled.

"But Petra! Starving! This is a bad business. Where is he now? Do you mean he hasn't money to buy meals with? What about his breakfast to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, I loaned him some money, all he would take. He's gone back to his room. He thinks they'll trust him for the rent until he gets a job. He's perfectly sure he'll get a job, now, you see, — now that he's all right, you know. He's terribly confident. He's going to try to sell cars again. He says he has a knack for that. . . ."

"You say you and Teresa fed him. — Teresa —" Lewis stopped. But surely now the barrier was broken down! Teresa was no longer to remain a mystery. For after all, Lewis and Petra and McCloud and Teresa were now linked together by the twist fate had taken this day. But Petra did not catch the implications of his tone and his hesitation. She offered no further details of the evening's doings. Where they had fed the starving man, what they had fed him, and Teresa's part in it all, were not forthcoming. "Is it all right about to-morrow at ten? That Neil should come to see you then?"

"Of course. I wish he had come to breakfast, though.

I wish you had waited till I came back, this afternoon. Why didn't you, Petra?"

"That's what Teresa said, that we should have waited. But when I found that Neil was *hungry* — everything else went out of my mind. I'm sorry."

"My dear! You have nothing to be sorry about. You'd better be rather satisfied with your day's work, I should say! I hope your family understand that your not turning up for the birthday party was — was not your fault in any way."

Petra lowered her voice to answer that. It was almost a whisper. Lewis suspected then that she was afraid that her end of this midnight conversation might be overheard. Clare had waited up for her. "I couldn't really explain anything much about it, Doctor Pryne. You see — he — Neil — doesn't want any one to know about — about what's been happening to him. He cares a lot that nobody should know. So I just said it was work for you — my job — that kept me away, and that it had to be confidential. But Clare's upset — a little."

"I'm sorry. . . . I'll write your father a note tomorrow morning, Petra. I'd better. He will make your stepmother understand. But I'm sorry it was unpleasant when you got home. . . ."

"Oh, I don't mind that. Clare wasn't cross. Only hurt, you know. But the evening — well, the evening has been — lovely. We've had a wonderful time!"

"*We've had a wonderful time!*" The words and the lilt in them echoed over and over in Lewis' head, forbid-

ding sleep. He told himself it was the oppressive heat of the night which held him awake, his eyes open on the dark. At least, he told himself that in the beginning. After an hour or more of restless tossing, however, Lewis admitted the truth. It was Petra's happy, excited voice saying "*We've had a wonderful time*" that was making the very idea of sleep fantastic. The words and the new tone in which she uttered them opened vistas to Lewis' imagination. It was absolutely inevitable in the light of to-day's happenings that McCloud should — *worship* Petra. How could he fail to! Only an imbecile, given the situation, could help it. McCloud, of course, was no imbecile. And Petra — how would she respond to the fellow's idolization! Now that Lewis was at last face to face with the prophetic misery which was keeping him wakeful, he went on with it — followed the train of thought which he had, in his attempted self-deception, dammed up, while he tossed and blamed the stuffiness of the night. . . . McCloud was a gorgeous person. Gorgeous was a cheap adjective ordinarily, but in this one instance, it was the right adjective. McCloud — let Lewis face it, see it — was a gorgeous creature, not only physically, to look at, but in inward ways as well. Directness, simplicity and courage. Those qualities make for gorgeousness in a man. How could Petra, after to-night, fail to see McCloud as godlike? Why, her very share in bringing him back to life — for wasn't that practically what she had done? — would add to her sensibility of his splendor.

"*Oh, I don't mind. The evening — well, the evening has been — lovely.*" Lewis laughed audibly. Why should she mind! Why had he ever thought she might, and been concerned about it? How should a stepmother's annoyance tarnish such a meeting and recognition as had come into Petra's life to-day! The very tone in which she used McCloud's Christian name showed how things had gone between them. . . . Neil and Petra. . . . "My God!" said Lewis into the dark. "Neil and Petra! Was it foreordained?" He felt a powerful impulse to communicate further with Him of whom he had so spontaneously asked the bitter question. He turned over and buried his face in his crossed arms. But he did not know how to go on with the Contact — did not know how to pray. Lewis had been born into the tradition that formal prayers which one has by heart have no functioning quality. One must make up one's own prayers, for originality is the only guarantee of His creatures' sincerity the Omniscient will recognize. But Lewis doubted this proud notion now, as he lay here, facing down into the dark, helpless with the anguish of loss. If only there were patterns: sweet, fluent channels of accustomed prayer, through which one could pour one's blind groping toward fortitude and peace! What was it McCloud had said to God in Lewis' office this afternoon? That was prayer, certainly, — even though not uniquely and strikingly the boy's individual invention. "God have mercy on me a sinner." Yes, that would do. "God have mercy on me a sinner." Lewis uttered the ancient un-

original cry-of-all-souls with stark sincerity to God imminent, God transcendent, and added to it, after a long sweet stillness, "It is Your justice. Why did I think Petra was for such as me? Your justice is Your mercy, Lord."

In the morning Lewis seemed to remember that peace had flowed into the channel his prayer had cut through his dark with a rushing benediction in a sound as of many waters. Peace. Then sleep.

In the weeks that followed, Cynthia Allen gradually came to admit to herself that she had had all her worry for nothing about Lewis' untoward infatuation for an uninteresting young girl; for the affair — if one could give anything so fleetingly ephemeral such a title — had blown over. She had been silly even to imagine it serious. A person like Lewis, so subtle, so perceptive, could not long be held in thrall to mere physical attraction and youth, with nothing to give it depth. No, Harry had not succeeded in convincing Cynthia of the ineptitude of qualifying passion with "mere." Harry was a simple soul, really, in everything except finance. You could not expect him to understand a man like Cynthia's famous brother. Lewis was all intellectual subtlety. First of all, in any contact, he would look for understanding and depth. Passion, when it appeared, would be a by-product of the discovery of his ideal. He was like Anodos in "Phantastes" in that. Cynthia was sure of it. He was not common clay!

For weeks now Lewis had not come out to Meadowbrook. That was hard on the children and on Harry. They were so devoted to him. But Cynthia herself was not the loser. She frequently met him in town for lunch, where she had him much more to herself than she possibly could in the midst of the family. And it was fun gossiping with him, her interesting brother, in domestic freedom, giving him innumerable anecdotes of the children, telling him what Harry thought of the financial situation between the countries, and in our own country, and of what she herself thought of the latest selections of the book clubs. Cynthia subscribed to all the American book clubs and had recently added an English one to the list. . . . And sometimes, always in fact, she slipped in gossip of Green Doors; for Green Doors and its inmates fascinated Cynthia increasingly. The life there — the people who came and went — the parties, the talk — all of it was just a degree above anything Cynthia had ever experienced before of sophistication and a "newer, larger liberty of thought and feeling." The air was electric. She remarked on it often.

Why, even Petra now interested her, rather, and had taken her place as part of the general fascination of all that made Clare's life so dramatic. For Petra was having a romance; and all the world loves a lover — at least when no relations are involved. It was that attractive young Irishman, Neil McCloud. Petra had picked him up somehow, all on her own, without anybody's help, it seemed. Cynthia's curiosity as to the precise how of that

had never been satisfied, exactly. But he was forever at Green Doors these days — followed Petra around like a faithful dog — literally. If they weren't engaged, it was obvious they were the next thing to it. Perhaps they were engaged and were refraining from mentioning it until Edyth Dayton McCloud should return from Switzerland with a divorce in her pocket. Cynthia often imagined to herself — and with some enjoyment — how the snobish Daytons were going to feel when they woke to the fact that the husband whom Edyth had so casually jilted was marrying Lowell and Clare Farwell's extraordinarily beautiful daughter. Cynthia imagined that the wedding, when it came, would be at Green Doors, outside, on the terrace or lawn; for Clare had no use for stuffy churches and organized religion, although she was more religious, Cynthia was sure of it, than most so-called pious people. Clare lived her religion without any pretense. She would plan a beautiful wedding. It was pretty wonderful of her, too, to take Neil McCloud in as she had done, without apparent question or hesitation. Petra liked him. Petra admired him. That was enough for Petra's step-mother. She was ready to like and admire him also. But it was only good luck and no special credit to Petra's discrimination, Cynthia felt, that nobody could help liking the man. He was a perfect darling.

To-day Lewis himself had taken the trouble to call Cynthia up and ask her to dine with him. And he was being very generous and extravagant, for him; he had brought her to the New World Hotel, the best dining

room in the city. It was almost the middle of August, the end of a summer that had been the warmest in Boston's weather record. Lewis was beginning to show, Cynthia saw, what the strain of the vacationless summer in the city had been. There was a perpetual white line around his mouth, two dark hollows in his forehead, and he was certainly thinner. But — bless him — he appeared to be as interested in herself and her chatter as ever, and as alive to all her interests. About himself and his work he had nothing to say except to tell her, when she asked about it, that his new book was all but finished. The last set of proofs, in fact, would go to the publisher within a few days.

"That's grand," Cynthia congratulated him. "All's well then and the goose hangs high?"

"Oh, yes," he laughed. "The goose hangs high. They've already started arranging in Vienna for the translation. I've let Mendel have it. I've quite a nice letter from him about it. Came to-day. If he comes over this fall, and he must, I think, may I bring him to Meadowbrook? I should like him to meet you."

Cynthia was thrilled, naturally. Between her famous brother and Green Doors, her life held all sorts of potentialities these days. It was fun having interests outside and a little beyond mere "Society," with all its futilities!

"Somebody told me Mr. Malcolm Dayton has come to you for treatment," Cynthia said, suddenly remembering it. "Clare told me, I think. Not Petra. She's as

secretive with me about office affairs as if I weren't your sister. Is it true?"

"No," Lewis answered. He was always a little short when she questioned him about his patients. Cynthia never got used to it nor quite understood it. "Where'd Mrs. Farwell get such a notion?"

"She was waiting for Petra. In the reception office. She said he came in while she was there. She was interested, of course, on account of Neil. Very much interested, as you may imagine!"

"Oh? But yes, I remember. He wanted to see me about a personal matter. It was a damned interruption in office hours."

"Was it about Neil?" Cynthia was curious almost beyond bounds. And it would be gratifying to have some really interesting news to take to Clare. "Has old Dayton tumbled to the situation? Does he know Neil's fallen on his feet — in the inner circle at Green Doors?"

"No. At least, I don't know anything about what he knows or doesn't know about his son-in-law. Certainly he didn't mention McCloud to me. He wouldn't. It's to be hoped he doesn't even know McCloud came to me for treatment. It's Dick Wilder's fault that anybody knows it. He saw him here one day and then meeting him at Green Doors he remembered. That's how you know, my dear Cynthia, and the Green Doors crowd. Petra never told. No, Dayton wanted my ideas on something in connection with a new charity he is starting. That, too, was confidential."

"Sorry! I didn't mean to be prying, darling. But I hope he doesn't know about Neil and Petra. He might get dog-in-the-mangerish feelings and stop the divorce going through. I'm not often so hateful, but I rather hope that Edyth is going to see what a fool she has been, too late. Why, from her, you'd think Neil was the veriest bounder. Clare says so, anyway. Edyth had filled Clare up with stories. Now Clare doesn't believe a word of any of it. She never happened to see Neil, or she wouldn't have believed them before, she says. But how she detests Edyth! Now more than ever — although she has always seen through her more or less. I always liked Edyth myself; though now, of course, I can see what Clare means about her! It's nice Neil makes money so easily, isn't it, in these times! He sold Harry a car last week — on the very day when Harry said we simply had to begin economizing. A joke on Harry! We have no more need of a third car than — than you have, Lewis! But after Neil had talked a few minutes, Harry thought life wouldn't be life without it! He's a super-salesman, — must be. Clare is wonderful about the whole thing. She says they're bound to be happy if Petra goes into it open-eyed. Petra must realize, though, Clare says, that Neil is the type always to have affairs. Nobody so stunning-looking, so amusing and good-natured, can help it. But also he is the type — if Petra'll only be a little understanding — who'll be reverential to his wife and simply adore his children. All Petra will need to manage him will be a little adroitness. That's Clare's only

worry about it — that Petra won't know how to manage him. Why even now — before he's got Petra safely for his, he flirts with Clare herself — absurdly — under Lowell's very nose. With me too. But nicely, you know. I'm rather thrilled and I love seeing Harry glower! Petra's a lucky girl."

Lewis had decided that he wouldn't have dessert, after all. Only black coffee. He'd begin drinking it while Cynthia had her ice, if she didn't mind. He'd have a second cup with her when she came to it. He had some work he had to do to-night later. Lots of coffee was necessary. He had brought some English Ovals along for Cynthia. Yes, truly. Would she have one now — or wait?

"He's a type who'll be reverential to his wife and simply adore his children." Petra the wife, Petra's the children. Why, now, after weeks of mental self-discipline and grim philosophizing — and nightly prayer — did such a remark have the power to rock Lewis' very being in agony?

Cynthia was eating what she considered a particularly delectable ice. Too bad Lewis didn't want his. "But there's one thing may spoil the whole show," she went on. Her chatter to-night was tireless! "It looks almost as if Dick himself is getting serious about Petra. Remember your asking me why he didn't, weeks ago? And I said, how could he? Well, he seems to be like most men — let another male admire a woman and they begin to think there may be something in her. Men act like sheep in

their erotic adventures. I don't know whether Clare has noticed it. But if she has, she probably isn't bothering. Dick needs some one quite different from Petra — a younger Clare. He is so utterly a product of super-civilization. While Petra and Neil — there's something untamed, unaccountable, about both of them. With Neil it's his Celtic blood, I s'pose. I shouldn't wonder if Petra's mother was Irish. Those blue eyes! Are you interested in all this chatter? Lewis, *I'm boring you!*"

"No, Cynthia. I'm not bored. Only it's all so futile. I didn't know you and your friend Clare had those two already married. Haven't either of you remembered that Neil is a Catholic? His marriage to Edyth Dayton was confirmed by a priest. No matter how legal a divorce she gets, so far as McCloud is concerned, he is married to Edyth as long as they both live."

"Oh! — But if Edyth can be free, why can't Neil? He never mentions anything religious. I don't believe he gives it a thought!"

"Perhaps not. I don't know anything about that. But if your surmise is true, it is only temporary. In his heart McCloud would feel that any marriage he contracted now was no marriage. Whatever his plunge into Clare's circle has done to him, it won't — in the last analysis — change his Catholic heart. At least, I don't see how it can."

"But Lewis! Surely — surely you aren't so — why, I don't understand! You wouldn't have a man like that go *unmarried*! He's just the sort to go to the devil — if

he hasn't ties. Of course he will marry again. If not Petra, some one else. He's bound to."

Lewis had good hold of himself now. He said, "No one is bound to be disloyal to the truest thing in him. Any more than he's bound to be loyal to it. We're creatures of free will. But if McCloud does use his free will toward the destruction of his new-found integrated self, I hope that it won't be Petra who is the instrument. I'm very fond of Petra, as it happens, — deeply fond of her; and to see her ruin any man's life — I simply can't, that's all. No matter what tragedy this means for them both, I hope they don't go so far as a marriage pretense. Now I've told you my ideas on the subject, let's forget it. It's really their affair, not ours. But somehow I'm putting my faith on McCloud's integration saving them both from inevitable misery. Petra's doing awfully well at the office, by the way. Losing her would be no joke!" . . . He ended on something which Cynthia, taking it at its face value, considered a laugh.

But though she let the sound pass as a laugh, Cynthia looked at her brother rather keenly. Had she been wrong? Was he still attracted by Petra himself? She shrugged it off. No, she was not wrong. Mere physical attraction wasn't going to twist Lewis' fine, important career out of shape, wasn't going even to worry him for a minute. She was happily sure of it.

It was true, what Lewis had just said of Petra's work. She had made herself invaluable in these long, hot, trying weeks, both to him and Miss Frazier. She could take

dictation now, if given a trifle slowly, and when Lewis and Miss Frazier were both working under pressure, they sometimes even left letters unread for Petra to sign. And in the reception office people trusted her and liked her. They liked her even to the point, it seemed, of not minding being put off by her. This was a blessing in itself, since putting off people was one of the chief functions of her job. Just her voice over the telephone seemed to have the power to salve wounded feelings and instil resignation in importunate patients.

Lewis had taken her out to lunch several times during the summer, getting in his bid ahead of Neil or Dick. But those intimate hours afforded no reprieve from his loneliness for the real Petra. Those hours tête-à-tête over little tables turned Petra and Lewis into strangers. Although Lewis never accepted Clare's eager invitations to parties and intimate teas at Green Doors, and met Clare only by accident at times when she came up to the office ostensibly to see Petra, Petra still considered him Clare's friend, not hers. She clung almost passionately to that assumption. Lewis knew no way of breaking it down. Her stubbornness in this one matter was equalled only by her reticence. And since their midnight telephone conversation, she had never spontaneously brought Teresa into the conversation once. To his own tentative and diffident suggestions, she had always the same answer, "If she asks me, I will take you to see her some day. But not just now. She is — very busy."

So paradoxically their casual contacts in the office were

better, more satisfying, than any planned tête-à-têtes. When he stopped by her desk, going out to lunch or coming back, Petra might tell him of some comical incident that had come up during the morning in her gracious sphere, the reception room, and they would chortle over it in good fellowship. But sometimes she seized the opportunity to plead somebody's case with him. To-day she had done that. Wouldn't he please give Mrs. Jack Loring more attention? It was so special, so pitiful, — the thing she wanted his help with. Wouldn't Lewis at least talk with Mrs. Loring about it? Lewis had not minded taking the time to explain to Petra — standing by her desk, looking down into her lifted, serious eyes, — that this particular committee worker was hysterical, and hopelessly sentimental, as well as outrageously interfering. Children were better off — he expounded it at some length, just to stay there near Petra — better off in degraded homes than in public institutions. But he would promise to do something in his own way, leaving the meddlesome social worker out of it, if he found that anything could be done without violating ordinary human rights to privacy. . . . It was at such moments as this that Petra was herself with Lewis and that something real was regained — and retained for as many precious minutes as it lasted — of their first intimacy on the edge of the June meadow.

But suddenly Petra had looked past him, in their whispered colloquy this afternoon, and smiled. McCloud had come in and was waiting until "the boss" should

leave off and Petra be free for him to take for a noon spin in the glittering, swanky, sports roadster which, as a salesman, he had at his disposal. Looking from one to another of them in that minute, Lewis had been impressed more profoundly than ever with how alike they were. The eyes were the identical shade of blue. Such a terribly intense blue! They might be brother and sister. Or first cousins. But it was always startling, — as freshly and poignantly startling, every time he saw them together, as if he had never before noticed it. And they were both so vibrantly young! Tall, long-limbed, wide-shouldered, strong-chinned — and then again that intense blue of their eyes! They might be Siegmund and Sieglinde in love, and above the incest-taboos of mere mortals, belonging to each other by their very resemblance. . . .

"Lewis, you look ghastly!" Cynthia broke into her brother's swift lapse into revery, shattering it with her concern for him. He was grateful. It was not very easy, seeing Petra give to Neil what she had once seemed to give to himself — and then withdrawn — with such adamant mysteriousness.

"You do. Simply ghastly! You've put off your vacation too long this year. When are you taking it?"

"Well, that's why I got you in to-night, to tell you. I'm taking a little one right away. Going off to-morrow. With Dick. Down to Mount Desert. We're starting early in the morning. I'm driving. We'll be there several days. Sailing. Climbing. Dick's in some sort of difficulty. Some-

thing he wants to talk over, anyway. And it's a good time to go. I can take the proofs with me."

"Oh, need you? Don't. It's too silly, on a vacation! But then it's too silly to call it a vacation, anyway — a few days! Yes — I've seen myself Dick's worried. But why doesn't he confide in Harry or me — or Clare? Why does he think he can spill it all out on you — you of all people — who have altogether too much of this talking-it-all-out-stuff in your daily grind! It's pretty inconsiderate of him, I think. Clare's wise, capable of complete detachment, and besides all that, utterly devoted to the creature. I suppose it is sympathy he wants. Or perhaps — I wonder — is he all snarled up over Petra? If he is — Clare's certainly the person to hash that over with!"

Lewis said, "No, I don't believe Dick has anything on his mind that has to do with Petra. Why do you put that idea into my head, Cynthia? If I had thought it was that — but it isn't — I'd have gone alone. Cynthia, you are the world's prize idiot. Do lay off prying and finish your coffee. It must be stone cold. How does Harry abide you! If you start crowing here, they'll put you in jail as a disturber of the peace. No, you can't have another cigarette. If I'm going in the morning, I've got to get back to work now. It's fun getting you furious in a position where you have to consider your dignity. You're really quite sweet, all bottled up like that, but foaming around the cork. Come along, sweetheart. Let's get going."

People turned to look at them as they left. Their conversation had been far too animated for husband and

wife. No, it was romance, it must be. But how distinguished they were! It was always interesting, dining at the New World! You might catch a glimpse of anybody there. It was cosmopolitan and very chic for Boston.



Chapter Seventeen

LEWIS HAD ANTICIPATED THREE OR FOUR DAYS OF SAILING among the islands about Mount Desert to the tune of blue sea, blue sky, white clouds, whitecaps, and the salt wind over all. But an unprophesied nor'easter did its best to ruin the holiday. The sky was clear when they started from Boston in Lewis' car (Dick had been unselfish in letting it be Lewis' car rather than his own) and it stayed clear until they were within sight of the island. Then suddenly the wind changed and every aspect told them that they were in for a likely three days of drifting fog.

"It will have to be golf and walking, I'm afraid," Dick apologized for his island. "This is rotten luck. And we'll have to use all the tact we can muster in dealing with the Langleys. They will be humiliated beyond words!"

The Langleys were the married couple, Yankees and native to Mount Desert, who lived on the Wilder estate in Northeast Harbor and were in charge of the place the year around. The elder Wilders for years past had spent most of their time in Europe, returning for a few weeks

each winter to their Brookline home, but coming down to their Mount Desert estate almost never. It had tacitly become Dick's responsibility and playground. Each summer he entertained several house parties here, and often came alone with some friend, as he was doing now, for a few days of sailing and climbing. If at his appearance the weather was not "typical" the Langleys felt it a flaw in their hospitality; and his days here with Lewis, Dick feared now, would be rife with the good couple's reiterated apologies for the weather — and all the more insistently because the guest of this particular visit was so important a personage.

"Tell 'em you'd rather walk than sail!" Dick pleaded. "Tell them you know the views so well that it is just as if they were there for you behind the fog! Tell them that fog's darned restful and just what you need. You see, they are really well-informed people, and you can bet they know all about who you are. You'll have to work hard, right at the beginning, to put them at their ease, or they'll be so chagrined they'll follow us around apologizing all the time. They will be like parents who keep saying when the rector calls that their children never acted up like this before and they simply can't understand it. You'd think they had created Mount Desert and lived only to display it to me and my guests."

"I understand." Lewis laughed. "I've noticed that most Mount Desert folk are like that, other years. The first time I came down here, do you know, I couldn't see any farther than my hand could reach, practically, for

two solid weeks. That was in August too. I wouldn't have known there were any mountains if they hadn't told me. But you can imagine *how* they told me! We were just puffing away in the old *Morse*, when the wind changed and it all came out diamond clear. It was like the never-never land. I thought then that it was the finest scenery in the world. Norway itself can't beat it. I'll tell the Langleys that. I'll tell them how I know it by heart. We'll see, between us, that they don't suffer beyond endurance!"

So they drove in at the wide stone entrance gates, laughing.

It was pretty disappointing, all the same. The sky, the sea, the mountains were all there, like the next page in a book — but a page that has annoyingly stuck. Dick took it harder than Lewis, however. He had counted on the sharp clear outlines of this Mount Desert environment to make self-expression easy. He had got Lewis down here, really, for the sole purpose of clearing his own mental and emotional decks of clutter. And the fog, somehow, seemed now an externalization of that inward confusion. Having it here, visibly and sensibly pressing in around him, turned him inarticulate. It was Clare who had planned this expedition, really. She it was who had suggested that Dick "clear his emotional decks by talking things all out with Doctor Pryne." But it wasn't going to be so easy. — Besides, Lewis wasn't acting like himself, Dick thought. You couldn't call him morose exactly, but neither was he particularly exuding sympathy.

He was abstracted: as if he had his own thoughts — even possibly his own worries.

At breakfast the next morning they decided against golf. Lewis wanted exercise, he said, and how about climbing a few mountains? Even without the view, he felt like climbing — strenuously. So Dick, putting aside his own silent preference for a morning of golf, started off as cheerfully as he could manage on a foggy all-day walking and climbing jaunt with this somehow new and strange Lewis. The plan was that they should begin gradually — Asticou Hill, Cedar-Swamp Mountain, and then with second wind acquired, traverse the mile-long ledge to Sargent's top, swim in the pond below Jordan, and descend the bluffs to Jordan Pond, and a taxi home in time for dinner.

They left Lewis' car at the foot of Asticou Hill, and started up, thick bars of chocolate in their pockets and thick Alpine sticks in their hands. Lewis was ahead on the faint thread of trail, straining his eyes for the cairns which marked the way. Gray gnomes, these cairns seemed to him, each as it pierced the fog, toppling forward or sidewise, beckoning him back from the pathlessness of foot-high forests of blueberry scrub to the faint foot-worn windings of the climb.

"I planned a house one summer to stand right here," Dick said, when they came to a giant gray boulder and automatically halted, leaning their backs against its inviting side, looking down into the sea of fog that shut them onto the hill. "It was my first completely visualized

house, really. I was twelve, about. I saw the house as a sort of a growth out of the hill. The skies came down, the sea came up, and the doorsill was solid sunlight. Sometimes I really can't believe it isn't here, it was so real to me then. But I went farther than architecture in that first venture. I peopled that house, created a family to live in it. You needn't believe me, Lewis. I don't expect you will. But the mother of that family was quite extraordinarily like Clare Farwell. Looked like her, I mean. When I first saw Clare, years after, I recognized her as the woman of my early imagination — the mother in that first house of mine. By the way, we are standing by one of the windows in the bedroom I gave her. The bedrooms were on the ground floor, you see. The whole top story was living room — one huge, spacious apartment, practically all windows. But wasn't it — eerie — about Clare! Imagining her like that when I was just a kid! I'd never seen anybody like her then. Of course, I couldn't have. There isn't anybody like her. . . . Is there?"

"No, I suppose not," but Lewis' response had an absent-minded tonelessness. Yet in another minute he asked, his psychological interests stirring, "What were you yourself in that picture, Dick? Or weren't you in it?"

"I was the middle son of a large family. I remember you that summer, Lewis. You were down here at Doctor Montague's with Cynthia. She and Harry got themselves engaged at Jordan Pond. The second time they'd seen each other! I remember my tutor saying to some-

body or other that it was a whirlwind affair and he wondered how it would turn out. The word 'whirlwind' was what made the grown-up gossip exciting to me and why I remember it now. An exciting word! But speaking of Clare, don't you think it is rather thrilling the way she has managed to express herself in Green Doors? The firm would be surprised if they knew how little, really, I put myself into it. But that's good architecting, as I see it. Something like portraiture. If you see what I mean."

Lewis' mind was busy with a picture of Dick, a neglected only child, spending long summers on Mount Desert with servants and callow young college-boy tutors while his mother globe-trotted and his father made money, — a child stealing off up here to this lonely, wild hill to plan the ideal house and people it with a mother of his dreaming and a large family of which he was the middle member. "Do you see what I mean? About Green Doors? That it's portraiture? Portraiture of Clare? And that's why it's so perfectly what it should be?" — Would Lewis please come out of his abstraction and pay attention. That's what Dick's tone said.

Lewis obeyed and answered. "But is that quite fair? Most houses have more than one person living in 'em. Green Doors has. If you're going to do portraiture in your architecting, I should think it would have to be composite portraiture."

"Possibly, with some houses. But not Green Doors. It's Clare who colors everything there, and a lucky thing

for the others! Have you ever known such — such simplicity and utter *goodness*? Isn't she wonderful! Aren't you grateful that I have brought you together? Isn't just knowing her worth all the trouble you've taken with Petra? I bet it is."

"What do you mean, trouble with Petra? It's Miss Frazier who had to take trouble with Petra just at first, perhaps. But now she's invaluable to us both, let me tell you. She has a positive flair for the work."

"Really! I didn't realize that. Have you told Clare? She thinks it's really a kind of charity on your part, keeping Petra occupied. Petra herself says you are patience itself and that she is always doing something wrong."

"That's nonsense. Or else a form of perverted modesty. Miss Frazier and I would be lost without her now."

Dick would repeat this to Petra's stepmother, Lewis hoped. It was something at last, though almost infinitesimal, of course, that he could do for Petra, who asked and wanted nothing of him really.

Then Dick fell mercifully silent, occupying himself by scrawling letters in the sand at the base of the rock. Lewis began counting the fir-tree tops which pricked the fog with their pointed spires at irregular intervals down the hill; for Lewis had acquired a habit, when Petra was called to mind suddenly, as she had been just now, or came without being called, as she did all too often, God knew, of concentrating on the first other thing that came to hand. Now he counted tree tops. And though he was

smoking far too much — he knew — but to whom could it matter! — he took out his cigarette case.

"Clare wanted me to talk to you down here," Dick said suddenly. "Tell you things. But I rather suspect you know them already. You do, don't you?"

"What she means to you?" Lewis asked. He was sorry Dick had decided to plunge into intimate confidences exactly at this point. If he would only wait till the fog lifted — till the seascape was diamond clear. If a northwester would only blow! If the weather shifted, Lewis might be able to listen patiently (which was all Dick wanted, of course) to his "If-you-know-what-I-means," and "Do-you-sees." But he was in for it now. Dick had Lewis cornered just as, in his utter overworked weariness, he felt the fog had him cornered.

"Yes, what Clare means to me and what I mean to her," Dick was saying. "I imagine you saw how I felt about her almost before I saw myself. That day when I came to your office! And all during the summer it has gone on getting — well, more and more so. But it isn't Clare's fault. She saw things as they were even before I did and she warned me. She wanted me to go away, for my own good. She was sane and beautiful about it. Why, she talked in as detached and clear a way as you could have talked yourself, Lewis. And all the time — which makes her detachment so wonderful — she herself was involved in it all, do you see! I don't mean that she — that she feels exactly the way I do. She wouldn't. She isn't like that, anyway. She's too — unphysical. But our

friendship means everything to her, all the same. She says that passionate friendship is actually more involving than passionate love. Because it absorbs and colors the imagination, you see. If we were lovers, she says — as the world understands the phrase, you know — why, we mightn't mean nearly so much to each other as we do with things as they are with us. But she was ready to sacrifice this passionate friendship for my sake. She was afraid I might suffer too much, if it continued. You musn't think I am crazily conceited, Lewis, when I tell you that not seeing me any more *would* have meant sacrifice to Clare. I don't understand myself why she cares for me as she does. The miracle of her caring fills me with the deepest humility. But she does care. Our being together so much means everything to her, as it does to me, only in a different way. And she was ready to give it up! She said that, quite aside from the suffering it might bring me, there was always the chance that my caring so much for her might keep me from falling in love with some girl I could marry, do you see. And she talked it all out with me — quietly, bravely. But I wanted to stay, of course, — just so long as I was sure it was not hurting her, or making her unhappy. Do you understand?"

Lewis sighed. Not only Clare herself, but Clare even heard about, invariably overwhelmed Lewis with the greatest ennui — or in happier moments made him swearing, cursing mad. Just now it was ennui. But he tried to conceal his weariness for Dick's sake. Dick was not only Cynthia's husband's cousin. He was Lewis'

friend of many years. He had no brains — certainly — but artistic functioning in his brainpan somewhere took the place of brains, and most whiles made him companionable enough. So now, after sighing, Lewis said, "Yes, I understand perfectly. But Clare is obviously right: clearsighted, as you yourself must see. The friendship is destructive to you while it leaves her unhurt. You ought to snap out of it. It's no joke, I know, being head over heels in love with a married woman. But it does happen. And it's never any good sticking around and trying to get nourishment on half a loaf. A clean break is the only self-respecting possibility. Sorry — but you asked for it, old-timer."

A silence, charged with emotion (another of Dick's substitutes for brain) moving toward articulation followed. Then he blurted, "I can't do it, Lewis. One can't choose to starve. Half a loaf is better than none — even if it isn't filling!"

Lewis' response to that was unequivocal. "It is not better. It's just a sweet little hell. Clare gave you the right dope. Take it from her, if you won't from me. If you want to salvage your future, stay a long way away from Green Doors, and snap out of it."

"You talk as if you knew . . ." Dick was looking at his friend now with as much curiosity as surprise. "But Clare has stopped saying anything about my going. She put it up to me to decide for myself, anyway. She wasn't dogmatic and opinionated. Not for a minute! I decided to stay. It's not *that* I want your opinion on. I believe, with

Clare, in the individual's right to decide on the happiness or the misery he will take for himself. . . . So I'm staying, — but, thanks to Clare, with my eyes open. It hasn't been easy. It is just about what you say — a sweet little hell."

"Well, of course . . . So that's that. Shall we get going?" Lewis picked up his stick and crushed a half-smoked cigarette under his heel.

"No, wait a minute. See here, Lewis, I want to talk to you. I can't talk, walking. It was Clare, really, who sent me off down here with you. And I haven't come to the point of what she wanted me to tell you yet. That was only preliminary. Clare has a scheme. — She thought you'd agree that it was, perhaps, rather a good one."

Lewis groaned but selected another cigarette. Another "scheme" — "good." Clare was indomitable. He leaned back again, his elbows on the rock. They might as well have the rest of it now, he supposed, so long as they were messing about in thick fog, anyway. A little more or less confusion from poor Dick's mindlessness — what did it matter! But the next minute Lewis was galvanized into feeling that it mattered enormously. For Dick had said, "I didn't go away, you see. And I'm not going to. I couldn't leave Clare, to save my life. Our friendship (Clare's and mine) has become of such importance to us both — yes, Clare too — that now we see that nothing in this world could have the power to part us. Least of all, mere physical separation. We must stay — passionate friends. We belong to each other. I don't think you

can imagine, Lewis, what such friendship can be — or what trying to stamp it out of one's life would do to one. It would be infinitely easier to stamp out a sexual relationship than such a one as Clare's and mine. . . . Well, this is her scheme. She thinks it will make it possible for our friendship to go on being beautiful, even grow more beautiful, more dynamic. She wants me to marry Petra. That will make it safer for us both, do you see? What's the matter?"

The obvious matter was that Lewis had torn his coat sleeve, a jagged rent, somehow on the rock.

"Mrs. Langley will mend it for you. She can do a magnificent mend. But how'd you manage it? You were just leaning —"

"Yes, just leaning, and hearing the ravings of a blasted idiot. What are you trying to do? Be funny, I suppose! But I don't care for that kind of funniness. You can leave Petra out of it."

Dick was amazed but not silenced by Lewis' violence. "I felt surprised myself at first," he owned. "But it isn't so wild as you seem to think. And not a bit idiotic. I like Petra. I like her a lot. I didn't used to. It's only lately I've begun to understand her. She's — why, she's a stunning girl, really. And she isn't in love with anybody else, that I know of. She's not engaged to that McCloud person, in spite of Clare thinking for a while that she might be and was keeping it secret, the way she likes keeping things secret. But now Petra has told me herself she isn't. And I've got Saint Paul with me: It's better to

marry than to burn. . . . There's the whole Greek idea, too. Those Greek fellows, of course, weren't faithful to their wives in the sense that I shall be faithful to Petra. But the situation was rather parallel, all the same. They had their intellectual and spiritual friendships with men or with women not their wives — and it succeeded. It was wise and sane. Clare thought you would be sympathetic — understand —"

"Look here, Dick! Prick me and wake me up. This isn't real. If it is, if I'm awake, then somebody'd better advise Farwell to get in a good psychiatrist — but not me, thanks. I'm out of it. But Clare should be under observation. You too. You both had better leave Petra alone. Not that anything either of you could say or do will even so much as touch her wholesomeness! I'm a fool to get so excited about it. What do you say — shall we go back to the car and start for Boston — or shall we stick this out till the fog lifts? I'm perfectly ready to go back."



Chapter Eighteen

DICK WAS IN FAVOR OF STICKING IT OUT. HE THOUGHT Lewis madder, if anything, than Lewis thought him, which had the advantage of evening things up between them. . . . And then, halfway down the hill, Dick was struck by an idea. Was Lewis himself in love with Petra? Could anything be more probable? Petra was utterly beautiful. Propinquity too, and all that! . . . But why hadn't Clare seen this possibility? Suppose she had seen it —. Was that the reason why she had been so insistent on Dick's telling Lewis the whole situation? So that Lewis would be forewarned? But why would not Clare consider marriage between Petra and Doctor Pryne a very good marriage indeed? Clare wanted the very best for Petra. Dick never doubted that. Did Clare think, perhaps, that Petra could never be happy without a great deal of money? Well, Petra probably couldn't, and Dick, not Lewis, had the money. Petra was mad about clothes, lovely clothes. She dressed more interestingly than any girl he knew. Pretty big of Clare, with her own indifference to luxury and clothes, to con-

sider Petra's different temperament, and have such long, wise thoughts for the girl's future.

But Lewis was such a grand person! Quite aside from his fame, his personality was head and shoulders above any other man Dick knew, — even Lowell Farwell's. Oughtn't that personality to make up for Lewis' comparative poverty, even to Petra's rather shallow young view? Dick, in all humility, should think that it would and that in a choice between them any girl would choose Lewis, not himself. . . . But Clare understood Petra better, it seemed. It was clever of her not to have told him that Lewis might be his rival for Petra, but instead to send them off down here together, where Dick could find it out for himself. But put yourself in Lewis' place. If you were in love with a girl, and a friend came to you and told you he was *not* in love with this same girl but wanted to marry her all the same, — how would you feel? Pretty furious! Just the way Lewis had acted! Dick wondered that Clare hadn't had as much imagination for Lewis' feelings, as she had had for Dick's own, and Petra's. Well, Clare loved him and Petra; and Lewis, after all, was only a respected acquaintance. That explained it. But it was tough on Lewis, all the same.

As they reached and crossed the wide trail toward Jordan Pond, Dick felt a new emotion coming to life and ascending in his heart — like a skyrocket. Elation! To win Petra from a fellow like Lewis! To imagine Petra desired — and by such a man — had had the effect of making her suddenly more desirable to himself. He

would tell this phenomenon to Clare, when he got back, quite frankly. You could tell Clare anything. Her detachment was an exquisite, a consoling thing. If he told her that Petra, he felt, might in time come to take Clare's own place with him, Clare would even then keep her dear, generous detachment. But of course, Dick could never have any such nonsense as that to tell Clare. No matter how fond he ever became of his beautiful wife, Clare would remain as long as he lived, his — his most beloved.

Abruptly, Lewis interrupted these forecastings. "See here, Dick, I'm sorry I got so hot. But let's make a bargain. Don't you mention Green Doors again or anybody in it as long as we are together on this holiday, and I'll go back now and play golf with you instead of hiking. It's what you want, I know, and you were merely being altruistic. . . . The idea of going on walking, anyway, doesn't appeal to me."

"Really?"

"Really! We can swing around to Asticou Inn and go back for our clubs, can't we?"

They could and they did. But Dick did not know what Clare would think of the bargain he had struck with Lewis. She had expected the two to talk endlessly, to hash everything over. . . . Or what had she expected after all? Dick was no longer so certain. Well, he had only to get back to Clare, look in her candid, sweet eyes, to lose this sudden new sense of confusion about what her motives in getting him to confide in Lewis might be.

She could and would explain to Dick's complete enlightenment and satisfaction. She always did.

That evening Dick left Lewis reading Agatha Christie's last detective novel by an open fire and walked into Northeast Harbor alone for their mail. If Clare had written him yesterday, as she had half promised to do, the letter would come to-night. All through the long hours on the misty golf course and ever since, this expectation of a letter coming to-night had been a steady undertow to all that went on in Dick's mind. The entire day had been for him nothing in the world but a straight path to the letter window of Northeast Harbor's little post office. The mail was sorted by eight-thirty, he knew, and sometimes a trifle earlier. But, taking hold on all the strength of character he possessed, Dick had determined not to arrive at that window of dreams one minute before the certain time of half-past eight. He knew how painful it would be to stand around waiting, watching the mail being sorted and not absolutely certain of his letter. Now, as he came down the village street through the drizzling fog, he saw that the cars parked near the post office were starting up their engines and that people with letters and papers in their hands were coming from the post-office door. And he walked faster. Whether the thick thugging tom-tom his heart had set up was delight or anguish, he did not consider.

The window gained, and Dick's turn in the waiting

queue at last arrived, he snatched the little bundle of letters from the smiling postmistress with a muttered, blind "good evening" and turned with it to the counter. His fingers, shuffling the letters through as he looked for Clare's hand, were shaking. There were half a dozen letters for Doctor Pryne readdressed in Petra's script. But there was nothing for himself. Nothing that counted. Petra had written him, it seemed. A letter in a fat envelope. But he was so dulled by disappointment that he hardly bothered to wonder why she had written or what.

He stuffed the whole bunch into his pocket and returned to the delivery window. "Are you sure there's nothing else for Richard Wilder?" he asked. It was a childish act, he knew, but he could not seem to help himself. Obliging, the, to Dick, faceless automaton at that fateful window turned back to the letter boxes. She even thrust a hand up into the Wilders' now grimly empty pigeonhole, pretending to make certain of what was already a certainty. The look on the man's face asking the unreasonable question made the gesture, empty as it was, a human necessity. She came back to her window. "Nothing *now*." The young woman spoke tentatively, averting kindly eyes. "In the morning's mail perhaps."

Out in the fog again Dick had to laugh at himself. Why did he need a letter so? They trusted each other, he and Clare. What did passionate friendship mean if not trust and peace, even in separation! Besides, it was scarcely sixty hours since they had parted. And he would

see her in thirty-six more. Lewis and he had decided to cut their holiday short and return to-morrow, after all. They gave the weather as their excuse to each other, but not to the Langleys. It was agreed that the doctor to-night was to receive an important letter which made their dashing off necessary. The fact was that ever since Dick had begun to suspect Lewis' feeling for Petra, a constraint had settled between them which made their close companionship just now more of a strain than a relaxation. So day after to-morrow Dick would be out at Green Doors again. It was unworthy of Clare's beautiful friendship that he should feel actual written words from her, which he could keep in his pocket and touch, a necessity to his sense of assurance of that friendship. It was unworthy and faithless in him. But letters were uncanny things! *Wanting* one so terribly was uncanny too. . . .

Lewis glanced up at Dick welcomingly as he came in. The detective story had returned him to a healthy, intellectual mood. He was accustomed to find this type of reading as effective as a good game of contract or chess for keeping one sensible.

"This Christie is O.K., Dick," he said. "You must read it yourself. It's as good as anything she has done. I'll be through in half an hour or so and you can have it."

"Good! I picked up a new Dorothy Sayers as I came along, at Blaine's drug store. You can have that to finish the night with. Here's your mail."

Dick had dropped the little pile of letters onto the arm

of Lewis' chair, and pulling another chair up to the hearth, he sprawled himself into it, eyes moodily on the fire.

Petra's fat letter to Dick was on the top of the pile. In his disappointment at not hearing from Clare, Dick had completely forgotten he had any letter at all. Lewis picked it up, turned it around in his fingers, looked at Dick. But Dick was bent forward, poking the fire. He jumped when Lewis spoke.

"This seems to be yours."

"Oh, sure! I forgot it. Toss it across, will you. It's a fat one. Funny!"

Putting down the tongs and leaning back in his chair, Dick tore the flap open with his thumb, and twisting around to get a better light on the sheets, began lazily reading Petra's long letter. Lewis made no pretense of returning to his detective story or of looking over his own mail. Petra's handwriting on the envelopes in his little pile that remained stared up at him ironically. This was as much as he had of her, or ever would have, he felt. Her hand readdressing somebody else's letter to him. Petra's handwriting was stirring — and Lewis believed it would be stirring to him even if he did not know and love and desire Petra as he did. The characters were consistently round, clear, black and perfectly spaced. The writer of such a script was scrupulous — exquisitely scrupulous — not to waste one instant of the recipient's time or energy. It was like Petra's own perfect manners, visible in black and white. But how arid to be sitting here,

studying and appreciating the nuances of Petra's agreeable manners, while Dick was reading her heart; for Dick had lost his indifferent, lounging attitude when he began to read Petra's long letter, and his profile — all that Lewis could see of his face — was tense and excited.

Lewis got up hastily, leaving his letters where they were on the arm of the chair, and went out onto the piazza. The fog sucked up to him, enveloped him. He coughed, choked sharply. These Mount Desert fogs were like no others in the world, he thought, and for once, it occurred to him that he ought to possess himself of an automatic cigarette lighter: you couldn't strike a match successfully out here in this insidious fog. But cigarette or not, he would not return to the warm fire-cheered room until Dick had done with that letter and put it away out of sight.

What would Dick do with the sheets when he had finished them, anyway? Lewis visualized him tossing them casually into the fire. Then he visualized himself putting his own bare hand into the fire and pulling them out! "Am I crazy?" he wondered. "What is there in her mere handwriting that stirs me more than the sight of Petra herself? It is the essence of her personality — as the voice is — only visible." If Petra should ever write himself a letter — if such a day ever came — Lewis felt now that her handwriting on the envelope would produce as profound a feeling in him as would her first kiss. He coughed again. The fog hated him. Then Dick came to the door, shouting "Lewis! Oh, Lewis!"

"Oh! But I couldn't see whether you were there or not, Lewis! This heathenish fog! But come along in, do. I've got to talk to you. Really!"

And back in the room, over by the fire, the men stood facing each other across Petra's letter. For Dick had not tossed it in the fire. That had been only a daydream of Lewis' tired, driven mind. The letter lay on a little table, under Dick's palms, as he stood leaning on the table, looking down at it.

"See here," he was saying, "I promised to lay off our morning's discussion — Clare — Green Doors — all that. But something has happened . . . This letter . . . Petra has written . . . Amazing . . . It's quite moving . . . Sweet . . . And I want you to read it. It may open your eyes to something. It has mine. You may thank me. What I didn't get around to tell you this morning was that I had already done it — proposed to Petra. She turned me down but I wasn't sure she meant it. Clare was sure she didn't mean it. Anyway, I meant to try again when I got back. But now I see Clare was wrong. Petra did mean it. Will you read this?" Dick's face was glowing with the sheer generosity of the thing he was doing. "Will you read it?" he asked again, for Lewis was looking at him strangely — blankly.

"Would Petra mind?" Lewis asked.

"That can't matter. She wouldn't mind if she really knew you. And I owe it to you — after this morning. If we were two men in a novel, old boy, I wouldn't give it to you, and you wouldn't know right up to the last chap-

ter that your girl is yours for the asking. But this is life and we'll let the suspense of the situation go by the boards. Read and see what a darned fool I've been."

Lewis took the letter. The sheets were steady in his strong, long fingers. Dick lounged back in the chair and watched his friend with growing uneasiness; for no light dawned in Lewis' serious dark face as he read. That face seemed, indeed, under Dick's very eyes, to grow thin and grim with controlled emotion of a sort totally other than Dick had expected.



Chapter Nineteen

IT WAS THE SEVENTEENTH OF OCTOBER. IT WAS ALSO Petra's birthday; and Lewis had relaxed in his practice of turning down all Mrs. Lowell Farwell's invitations and was now driving out to Green Doors to a dinner party given in honor of the birthday. Himself, Dick and the Allens were to be the only guests. Neil McCloud had been invited but was, Lewis understood, not coming. Lewis suspected that Neil's refusal had been the cause of Petra's manner to-day — not a birthday manner exactly. She had moved about at her work in a spirit of recollection, but a strained, anxious recollection which no doubt she thought went unnoticed by her employer. Lewis had first been struck by it when he asked her who was coming to her party to-night, and her answer had been that Neil was not. He had laughed and said, "But it was a list of acceptances I wanted — not refusals." She had lifted her eyes to his, at that, — she was sitting at her desk and he had stopped by it as he passed through to his own office to say good morning — and they had been blank with a kind of subdued misery. But she had

answered, "Clare tells me that you are coming, Doctor Pryne. The Allens. Dick. It is nice of *you* to have accepted."

"Don't say that. I am looking forward to it very much. My dear, will you accept this present? I've been days finding it, and if you don't like it I shall be terribly disconcerted."

It was the detail from the Fra Angelico picture: angels dancing, and saints embracing in a flower-studded meadow. A very good print, framed in silver. Lewis had brought the cumbersome thing under his arm, done up in brown paper, just as it had been sent to him from the store. Lewis did not hope, of course, that Petra would ever know why he had hit upon this particular present. It seemed inappropriate, perhaps, for a twenty-year-old girl's birthday present. But to Lewis it meant something they had once experienced together — a meeting of souls where language and explanations are no longer necessary, where all is unselfconscious joy, camaraderie and fluent communication between the saints in Paradise. That first sight of the June meadow behind Clare's guest house, which Lewis had likened to this picture — and thought of Petra and himself as saints, without their crowns to be sure, and their presence there in the paradisiacal meadow purest accident — had remained all summer a poignant memory. He hoped that Petra would keep this picture all her life, wherever she lived, and that even not understanding anything of what it meant to him in the giving, she would remember him now and then in

looking at it; and thus his memory would stay alive for her because of something which stood to him for their own one brief real meeting and recognition. Let that same quality of recognition never come again on this earth, — still it might yet come in heaven. Perhaps it only needed their crowns for the consummation of its promise.

An early frost had followed the unprecedentedly hot summer, and the trees all along the state highway to Meadowbrook had been stripped during the past few days of their flaming foliage. The fields and meadows stretched away brown and purple, barren too. But the clouds, like levitated mountain ranges, hung above the western horizon, blazing with autumn colors, red, gold, purple, buff. The day had had an Indian summer warmth over it and to-night the sky promised to be divinely clear with a full moon.

Lewis had sent Petra home from the office when she returned from her lunch. "Somehow you don't look like a party to-day," he had said. "Lie out in the sun on a blanket somewhere. It's warm enough. Get rested. This has been a heavy week." Miss Frazier was away on the vacation she had insisted on putting off until the book was actually in print and Petra really had been working up to the full capacity of her strength and ability.

If Lewis had not packed Petra off early, however, she would be beside him now in his rushing car, sharing the beauty of those levitated cloud-mountains along with him, and the bare tracery of tree branches against the

mellowed fields. He had had a selfish impulse to keep her late just to make this drive together inevitable. And he would have succumbed to his selfishness, had he not a better plan. Neil was not to be there to-night. Whether Dick was absolutely out of the running or not Lewis did not actually know. But Lewis had reached his limit of passive endurance. He had accepted the invitation because in the very act of reading Clare's note a few days ago, tending it, he had made up his mind that he would go with Petra by moonlight to the edge of that meadow (October now, not June, but in the moonlight it would still be Paradise) and tell her how he wanted her. If she was in love with Neil — and he knew, of course, that she was — it did not matter. He wanted Petra at last even if she came to him with a broken heart. It had taken Lewis weeks to reach this depth of humility. But now it was reached. He had struck bottom in his longing and suffering. If Petra in youth's scorn of compromises said that she had nothing she could give him, let it be so. At least, he would have reached for his star. But if he did not touch the sky to-night, did not draw it down to him, he must find Petra another job at once. It was impossible to have her in his office, feeling as he felt, longer.

At its very least, Lewis' proposal would have the advantage of making Petra see the necessity for her not going on at his office. She would understand and not be wounded. And he would find her something even better. In spite of the "depression" and Petra's lack of business experience, he promised himself — and he would

promise her — that she should not be the loser. In fact, all Lewis honestly hoped of this onrushing moonlight night was for an understanding between himself and Petra. A bitter understanding on his side — since she was going to tell him that she could not possibly marry him without loving him — but on hers illuminating. She would not go on, after to-night, so dangerously unconscious of the power of her young beauty and loveliness.

Remembering her letter to Dick two months ago down at Northeast — and when had Lewis forgotten it for a single hour! — he trusted Petra's ability to face things squarely, once they were given her to face. She had a clear, honest mind. She had been clear and honest with Dick. Lewis would now, to-night, by moonlight, on the edge of the Paradise meadow, be equally clear and honest with her.

The car reached sixty-nine on the clear-ahead highway, and the lines of Petra's brave letter streaked through Lewis' mind with almost a like speed. He knew it by heart from the one reading — that brave, dear letter to another man:

Dear Dick:

I am deeply sorry about the way I treated you last night. I have gotten up before dawn, Dick, to tell you how miserably sorry I am. Or I suppose it is really dawn, for all the east is red and purple. I am writing on Father's desk in the library. Everybody is asleep. But I haven't slept. I have been sitting up in bed all night, thinking of my cruelty to you. You see, this is the way

it was, Dick. When you kissed me like that, it was really just as if somebody passing me in the street had kissed me. I mean it was as unexpected as that. My only feeling was terror. That is why I struck out like that — just as you would in the dark, if something strange were striking at you. You'd strike back. Besides, no one has ever kissed me before. Not like that, I mean. No one has ever been in love with me before. And you see, anyway, I have thought right along — never thought anything else — that you came to Green Doors on Clare's account. It was Clare you always talked to. I didn't know you even looked at me. This may seem strange to you, Dick. Now I see that thinking that was pretty stupid. You have been shy with me — just as one *is* toward somebody one really loves. Clare has explained it. She came out on the terrace right after you went. I was crying. She found out what was the matter. And she showed me how cruel and stupid I had been. I know now that it was a great honor you did me in asking me to marry you, Dick. To love somebody like that and tell them so and have them do what I did — strike out at you like a serpent — must have been too terrible. The blow on your face was nothing to the blow on your heart, I know. But now I am cool and all night I have been thinking. It isn't just because Clare says so but now I *feel myself* how I owe you a deep apology. And I am going to tell you why, even if I hadn't hated your kissing me the way you did, I would still have *said* the same thing, that I couldn't feel toward you as you do toward me. You asked me, you know, if there was anybody else. If I was engaged. I told you no. Well, that was true. Of course I am not engaged. But now I am going to tell you something to prove how sorry I am I treated you as I did last night and to show you how I trust you —

and how fond I am of you really, now that I see things about you and Clare in a truer light than I have been seeing them. It is this, Dick. I am not engaged, and I am not likely to be. But I love some one terribly. I love him the way you love me, I guess. But he doesn't love me any more than I love you. So that makes things even between us, Dick, doesn't it? Don't tell Clare this, of course. Or any one. I have told you to even things up, and to make you see that if I have hurt your pride terribly, and been cruel to you, the same thing has been done to me. All I said to Clare last night was that I should write to you and apologize and beg you to go on being friends and not stop coming to Green Doors. Clare and Father will miss you, Dick, if you stay away, and believe it or not, I think I shall too. I don't know how I ever behaved so brutally as I did last night, but I am always making mistakes and doing terrible things. Please burn this letter.

Affectionately — truly — Petra.

When Lewis looked up from that letter, Dick had said quickly, "It isn't McCloud, Lewis! Don't think it for a minute. Anybody can see how *he* feels about Petra. She could have him if she wanted him. It's written all over him. It's you she means, Lewis. You. Nobody else."

Lewis had said, "Damn you, Dick!" and then no more. He had held Dick to their bargain from that minute, not to discuss Petra or anybody at Green Doors ever again. He had seen to it that Dick did burn the letter as Petra had asked. And as it charred and went up in a hot blaze between the logs, Lewis had not reached his hand to rescue it. He had clenched his hands instead,

while his heart burned to a white heat and then withered into charred nothingness with the letter. In that minute Lewis had hated Dick almost as much as Clare. What had they tried to do, between them, to this poor baffled child! Of course it was Neil she meant. Poor Petra! And of course Neil did want her every bit as much as she wanted him. But there was the man's living faith — the faith neither Clare nor Dick could comprehend as a reality — which stood between him and Petra, forbidding them to each other.

Only now, after weeks of thinking and watching, had Lewis come to think that it would be best for both Neil and Petra if Petra could bring herself to accept half a loaf from life, and marry himself, if she could care for him even a little. For she was created and designed for giving — for motherhood, wifehood. And Lewis loved her with such utter abandonment! Mightn't the strength and truth of his love ultimately force a response almost in kind?

Lewis had little hope that this was even a possibility. But he had said his prayer — Neil's prayer, rather — the only one Lewis had ever learned to pray. He was saying it now, as he drew more slowly into Meadowbrook's environs. His nephews were expecting a romp with Lewis to-night before their supper. Then he would be changing into evening clothes at the Allens', for Petra's dinner, and would return there to sleep.

"Yes," he assured himself, driving slowly and more slowly, "I shall lose her forever to-night — or gain the

chance of beginning to win her." He had decided to tell her that he had read her letter to Dick down at Northeast and how innocent Dick had been in letting him.

"Dick, you see," Lewis would say to Petra, "simply thought he was fixing things up between you and me without making us wait for the last chapter! He thought in all honesty it was I, not Neil, you meant in that letter. Of course, I knew better. . . . But Petra, it isn't broken hearts that make for ruin and unhappiness in lives. Not ultimately, anyway. It is broken faiths. Neil stayed away to-night — don't you suppose — because of something dearer to him than mere happiness. Something more blessed than happiness." That was part of what Lewis would say to her. And then, if they kissed — if she let him kiss her there to-night on the edge of the Paradise meadow —

Well! Lewis' hope, though small, pierced his heart like a sword.



Chapter Twenty

THE DINNER WAS OVER — A MEDLEY OF FLOWERS AND fruit, shining candles, extravagantly imaginative food (Clare was no gourmand but her cook was a prize), much banter and some conversation. The cake had crowned it all. It was a perfectly recognizable model, two feet high or so, of the building where Lewis had his offices, and Petra herself, done in violet-colored gumdrops, was represented on the roof, sitting on a typewriter and surrounded by twenty minute candelabras each holding five candles. It was obvious that Dick had conspired with the cook. Every one was enchanted, but Petra most of all. "What a child she is!" Lewis had thought, with a variety of pang he had never before experienced concerning this girl. "A baby, really!" A thousand candelabra of birthday candles might have gone to the shining of her eyes, and her cheeks were rosy. She clapped her hands like a child in a fairy tale . . . at least, that is something children outside of fairy tales seem not to do, clap their hands when they are suddenly delighted.

But now they had left the dining room and come through the great hall to a small drawing-room at one side of the street door. Lewis and his hostess, at any rate, were there, sitting together on a sofa with ends curved like a lyre, facing the wide arched doorway into the hall, their backs to open French doors flooded with moonlight. Moonlight, dim lamplight, a fire burning on a white-tiled hearth, roses in silver vases — that was Clare's little drawing-room to-night. Cynthia and Farwell had drifted through the room with their cigarettes and out the French door to the moonlit road. Farwell called back as they went, "This is delicious, Clare! Your road is like a silver river to-night. You and Doctor Pryne must come."

But Clare by a glance had held Lewis where he was. She said to him in a low voice, "I'd rather watch Petra! Isn't she too delightful to-night! This is the way I have dreamed her. If only all days were birthdays!"

Harry Allen had gravitated to the piano up on the dais at the side of the great hall, and now he was drumming out jazz to make your heart jump, while Petra and Dick danced. They did not confine themselves to one small space on the floor in the usual way, but circled the whole hall freely. At dinner Lewis had noticed how the relationship of these two had changed since he had first seen them together, that fateful Saturday in June. Then Dick had only been aware of Petra, it seemed, as an excrescence on Clare's life. Now they were comrades. You saw it in the way they looked at each other, laughed

at each other, teased each other. In fact, they counted with each other every minute. This was a development for which Lewis was totally unprepared; for Dick had kept his promise, and since the fiasco of his and Lewis' holiday at Northeast Harbor had never so much as mentioned Petra the few times they had met. So Lewis had rather taken it for granted that Petra's naïve and illusioned letter had destroyed any possibility of an honest relation between them. From what ground had the present happy intimacy evolved? Lewis could not guess. When the cake had been brought in and set on the cleared table in front of Petra and she had clapped her hands, Dick who was beside her had kissed her cheek. It was a brotherly caress, hearty and genuine. But Lewis' heart had stood still. Was this to be the answer? Why not! How unconscionably unimaginative and stupid he had been!

Lewis and Clare were in a position to see the dancers during much of their way around the great hall. But Dick and Petra seemed not aware of the little drawing-room and their audience there. They might have been dancing out under the moon alone, so unconscious they appeared of anybody's eyes or attention. Dick held Petra as if she were a delightful glass doll that might break. And Petra gave the impression of glass. Brittle. Lovely. Her birthday gown made Lewis think of spun glass, it was so stiff and fragile. Even her fantastically high-heeled slippers seemed glassy. And her forehead, leaning against Dick's bowed-down forehead in the latest

absurd mode of the dance, added the last aspect of brittle fragility to what they were doing.

"Petra and Dick are great friends now," Clare said suddenly. "You can imagine, Doctor Pryne, how that gratifies me."

"Yes?" he said. "Yes. It's very nice." Lewis did not mind the idiotic sound of his own words. Clare simply did not count enough for him to listen to her. She was less than nothing to his consciousness, with Petra out there in Dick Wilder's arms, turning on fantastic spunglass heels to Harry's intrepid, persistent, absolutely compelling jazz.

Clare was all too aware of Lewis' indifference. Nothing to-night had gone quite as she had planned it. If she were honest with herself, she would have known that the imperfection of the way the birthday party was going really consisted in its perfection. The object of the party, Petra, had somehow, strangely, unbelievably, taken the center of the stage and held it. Even for her father she had held it. Several times, when Clare had said something directly to Lowell down the table, he had been slow to turn his eyes from his daughter. And once he had not turned them at all — merely answered his wife absently, while he continued to smile at some silly byplay between Dick and Petra. As for Doctor Lewis Pryne — who sat at her right during dinner — his manners were impeccable but his attention, she had known perfectly well, was for Petra. Even when he was not looking at the girl — and to be fair, he scarcely

looked at her at all — he heard every silly, childish thing she said, every laugh, — heard them through the things Clare was saying to him. This had never happened to Clare before. To sit at her own table and have all the attention sweep over her and away from her toward another. This was something she had never imagined or planned! It filled her with a sort of wild unbelief in its reality. It was dreamlike. Almost nightmarish.

She said now to Lewis, "Aren't they precious. Sweet! And everything before them! Petra seems to have had enough of young Neil, or he of her. Anyway, he seldom comes here now. But it was none of my doing. I was ready to stand back of him, in spite of my cherished hope that Dick might find his happiness in Petra. Dick told you of that hope, at Northeast. So you know how I have planned and dreamed for both those children, Petra and Dick. We — you and I, Doctor, between us, — seem to have succeeded in giving Petra her chance at life. Your job, anyway, has given her self-respect, self-confidence. And I — well, Doctor Pryne, you know because you are wise — pray Dick never knows — it has not been too easy for me to give her Dick. For one thing, honestly, I am not sure she is big enough for him. I tremble at my daring in taking her ultimate development so for granted. — Tell me — I need you to tell me, Doctor — say that in your judgment I have not been wrong. If I thought what I have done wasn't to mean Dick's happiness, — well, I should blame myself eternally. If in trying to mend his life I have complicated it — that is a

terrible thought. For you know — he told you — how he feels about me. Through no fault of mine. I saw it happening and I warned him. But I thought if only he could begin to care for Petra a little, in the end — in the end — well — he might come to care for me less. He did tell you?"

Lewis sighed. Little he cared whether she heard the sigh. And she did hear it. He said, "If you were actually giving Dick to Petra so that he might get over his young, romantic infatuation for you, it would, of course, be calamitous, Mrs. Farwell. Calamitous for them both. Ghastly. But that won't be the way of it. If they do marry, it will be because they have fallen healthily in love. You — and I — we are out of it. Clean out of it. Nothing to worry us."

"You think Dick no longer cares for me, Doctor Pryne?" Her voice was sharper than she meant it to be.

Lewis did not reply. His hostess or not, she was abominable. He watched the dancers.

Clare said, after a minute, "I see what you think! If only you were right! How happy that would make me, Doctor! But life isn't like that. Life makes us suffer. What I am so tortured by now is the fear that in my blundering I may not only have failed to help Dick, but I may have involved Petra in something amounting almost to tragedy for her. If she cares for him, as she seems to lately — if she has given up Neil for Dick, and Dick fails her — all our hearts may break in the end. But mine the most. For I am the cause of the muddle.

I have wanted only the best for them both. For us all. And what have I really done! I begin to fear that Dick — no matter how hard he tries — will never be satisfied with Petra. Knowing Dick, I ought to have known that. — But I wanted his happiness so."

She was crying. Unashamedly. But they were angry, baffled tears and Lewis knew it. The unkind part was that Clare knew he knew it. But she would show him. She would give him a demonstration of how he was wrong, how absolutely wrong he was. She would show him that Petra had no possible chance of being her, Clare Farwell's, rival! After long weeks of fearing it, to-night Clare was faced with the fact that this Doctor Lewis Pryne was not to increase her roll of wonderful friendships. But one slight gratification she would yet wrest from the humiliating situation: the man might himself distrust, even dislike her; but he should see that Dick Wilder was still her slave.

She got up and went to the door: stood by it, one bare, rather thin arm reached up along the jamb, watching the dancers. Lewis stayed where he was and smoked his interminable cigarettes. He was glad his hostess had left him, but concerned for the direction her steps had taken.

This time, as Petra and Dick neared the arch of the drawing-room doorway, they could not fail to know that they were the object of some one's attention. Dick wavered, let Petra go from his arms, seemed to wake from a fragile dream.

"Want to dance, Clare?" he said.

She shook her head.

"No. But Doctor Pryne is tired of talking to just me. Come on in and play with us."

Lewis got up and stood by the fire. Petra came and stood irresolutely near him, at a loss and waiting for Clare to lead the "play," whatever it was to be. But Clare wandered toward the French doors and stood, her back half turned, looking out onto the moonlight road. No one said anything. Lewis had no intention of "playing." He was swearing angry. Clare turned her head after a minute's silence, during which the three of them — Lewis, Petra, Dick — had stayed watching her, turned her head and looked at Dick over her shoulder. Then she stepped out into the moonlight.

Harry, oblivious that his dancers no longer existed, that the frail dream had broken, went on pouring out jazz. Dick had followed Clare, of course. He went as naturally and with as little fuss as if he were her shadow. Lewis and Petra were left, silent, by the fire.

Neither of them had a thing to say. The clock ticked, — an elegant little glass clock with glass flowers for dials, on the mantel near them. Then they heard Cynthia's voice out in the moonlight. "You'll need a scarf, Clare dear. There's an autumn tang."

"Oh, no. The moonlight's warm! We'll be right back. Get out the cards, Lowell, and since your heart is set on it, we'll have some poker."

But before Farwell and Cynthia came in through the French doors, Lewis had said quickly to Petra, "My

darling, you mustn't mind. Dick's such a fool he's not worth your little finger."

That brought Petra's face around to Lewis'. She took hold of the high carved back of a chair between them. Took hold hard. Eyes, lips, — suddenly they had become the attentive eyes of her childhood, looking outward onto a wonder-filled world. The unsullen lips of her childhood sweetly parted with expectant breath. For just that instant it might have been Petra back in the Cambridge apartment three years ago.

But unfortunately Lewis was totally unaware that "my darling" had come from his lips at all. He had no cue to the transformation. And then Cynthia and Farwell joined them and Farwell was getting out the cards. He sent Petra for a table. But as she started to obey, she was intercepted by Elise in the doorway. Petra was wanted on the telephone.

"Who is it?" Farwell called after his daughter. "It can't be important. Why do you bother?"

The maid answered, not Petra. "He didn't give his name, sir. But he said it *was* very important."

"Well, Elise, don't interrupt us again to-night with telephone messages or anything else," Farwell commanded. And then to Cynthia and Lewis, "Telephones are the devil! Damned intrusions on decent privacy! Clare agrees with me. We're thinking of having 'em taken out. As it is, it's a private number, of course, but Petra has given it to several of her friends. Only natural, I suppose. But I detest it."

Petra was back almost before her father was done grumbling. She came only to the door, however, and said, "I'm terribly sorry, Father, but I've got a headache. Elise is bringing the table. I couldn't possibly play. Tell Clare when they come in, will you? I am going to bed."

It would have been absurdly impossible to accept illness as an explanation of Petra's leaving her own birthday party so suddenly, if her story were not so borne out by her look. She had lost all the unusual high color of the earlier part of the evening and become extraordinarily white and peaked. Cynthia saw it as plainly as her doctor brother. She cried, "Petra, dear child! You must let me come with you. You do look really ill. And at your own party! It's a shame!"

"No, don't come, please. I'll be perfectly all right. I just want to be alone. Will you tell Clare, please, not to come in, afterwards, to-night? I may be asleep and I'd rather she didn't. Good night, Doctor Pryne. Good night, Mrs. Allen, and Father. I'm so sorry . . ."

When Clare and Dick drifted in a few minutes later, it was Cynthia who did Petra's explaining. But by then Harry had waked to the fact that nobody was taking advantage of his jazz and had come to the drawing-room.

"That's funny!" he said, breaking into his wife's account of Petra's sudden desertion. "Petra didn't go to bed, you know. She went out of the door. I saw her. That's why I stopped playing. I thought you and Petra

were dancing, Dick. Then I looked up and saw Petra going alone out the front door in a tearing hurry.

"Did she have a wrap on?" Cynthia asked, concerned.

"No. Just her pretty party frock."

"She's back now then," Clare said, "and in her bed. It's really cold." But she looked at Lewis, her eyes distraught. Had the woman any compunction for what she had done? If not, it was superb acting. She was a Duse, Lewis thought, but with her genius devoted to personal, secret dramas.

"Anyway, I'd better go up and see how she is," Clare murmured. "She doesn't have headaches like this, you know. Not suddenly. She must have been — disturbed about something. Put out. I'll go up. I think she'll come back."

"No, don't." That was Lewis. He did not care how sharply he spoke. "The child really looked ill. *And she particularly asked that you shouldn't go to her.*"

Clare's eyes grew wide, — darkened. She was superb! "Really? Well —" And then to her husband she said, with a shrug. "And I wanted her party to be a success!"

"Well, it was, my dear. It still is. And Petra'll be all right in the morning. She doesn't care much for poker, anyway. Let's start playing. It's going on eleven."

But Lewis was destined to blame himself, before many hours had passed, for dissuading Clare from going up to see about Petra. Afterwards, he never understood why he had sat there playing poker until midnight, after what Harry had said of Petra's going out of the door and

not up to bed. He had been stupid to the point of imbecility. But the reason was that Petra's transformation when he told her Dick wasn't worth her little finger, while she stood holding the back of that chair, had filled his mind so full of a simply blinding hope that there was no room for shadows — hardly for thought itself! He had accepted her story quite simply, when she returned from the telephone: she had a headache. He knew, too, of course, that she was furious with Clare. Any girl would be, under the circumstances. But for Lewis himself she had had that look.

It was hard for Lewis to have to wait until morning to see Petra again. That was all her going to bed in the middle of the party had meant to him — that he must wait now until morning. He was not to tell her his love by moonlight in the Paradise meadow, but to-morrow, in daylight, driving her in to Boston. He had got ahead of Dick in this, and it had been agreed he should come to Green Doors from the Allens' a little before eight.

He won steadily at the game they were playing, but smiled now and then his lighted smile that had nothing to do with material, mundane winnings.



Chapter Twenty-One

CYNTHIA, BLESS HER HEART, CAME DOWN FOR AN EARLY breakfast with her brother.

"If Petra's not over her headache, what will you do? Make her stay home?" she asked.

"I think she'll be over it. Miss Frazier's away on vacation, and I need Petra more than ordinary these days."

"You seem a trifle brutal, darling. Don't you believe the girl had a headache? I do. She looked terrible. I know Clare didn't believe it, but then she hadn't seen her. I heard Clare telling Lowell it was temper. I thought that was rather horrid of Clare, I must say. And now you are almost as heartless."

"Cynthia Pryne Allen! Do I hear criticism of Clare? I'd better take your temperature. You look all right but I am afraid you must be delirious!"

Cynthia leaned back in her chair. She had finished her grapefruit and black coffee. That was all she allowed herself for breakfast, having no ambition to compete with her Harry in avoirdupois.

"No, I'm not criticizing Clare. Not exactly. But lately — well, lately I've sort of come to understand Petra a little better. I feel as if I have, anyway. I don't think things are so frightfully easy for her at Green Doors. Not that Clare means to be unkind. Oh, hardly! But their temperaments don't jibe, that's all. Clare can't take it in, that any one can be so simple as Petra is. That's the trouble, I think. She thinks Petra's simplicity is always covering some design. But Petra hasn't any design. She's just a healthy, nice, rather sweet girl. She seems sweet to me, anyway. Just these last few weeks I've grown fond of her. You don't have to wonder where you are with her, ever. Why, I told Clare just last night that if I had a daughter I'd adore her to be a second Petra. She'd be so *comfortable* to live with."

"Yes? And what did Clare reply, if anything?"

"That made me rather cross, Lewis. She said that I didn't know Petra. She said she was 'deep.'"

"Did she mean it as insult or compliment?"

"Dear Lewis! When one woman calls another deep! — It has looked to me lately — nights at the Country Club, when they were all there together, the Farwells and Dick and Neil (that simply grand McCloud person, you know) — that Clare was almost jealous of Petra. Harry's got an idea that that's why Neil doesn't come to Green Doors any more. I shouldn't be surprised if he's seeing Petra secretly, somewhere else. I think Clare suspects it too. She's almost insufferable, anyway, the way she questions Petra as to where she has been and what she

has been doing. And she doesn't mind who's there, listening. It makes one very uncomfortable. It's hateful for Petra."

"Yes. One feels that," Lewis agreed. "But it isn't worth Petra's bothering about, or yours, really. Clare is — incorrigible. All the same, she must have some nice qualities, I suppose, or she couldn't plan gardens so astutely, and care about the books she does care about, and music and all. She does honestly care for those things. That's not sham. One can't sham that. Do you know what I think, Cynthia? I think that people like Clare are so awful simply because they are so close to being really fine. If Clare were just any silly woman, 'out for the men,' you'd laugh at her and find her, possibly, rather touchingly human. You might even like her. But it's precisely because she isn't a silly, superficial creature that the cruelty and ugliness in her seems such wretched cruelty, such wretched ugliness. She is an exquisite person — has exquisite perceptions, anyway. There's only that one unpleasant spot, her vanity in the admiration she excites in every one around her. If she were only sensual or selfish (openly, healthily selfish, I mean) — if she had any mean qualities at all, like the rest of us — she'd be forgivable. But it is the under-bogging of all this highly emphasized spirituality with endless quicksands of vanity that gives a fellow the jitters — unless he's sucked under, like Dick, and suffocated in it. It is obvious that Clare deliberately took Petra on as handicap to add to the zest of a game that

was becoming almost too easy to be exciting any longer. But now that the handicap begins really to weigh — as it did last night — she's lost her poise — and her pose. Last night Clare was openly vicious. One could sympathize — just possibly — with her wanting to vie with Petra for Dick's attention. But when it is in enchanting and holding Petra's own father she uses the girl as her foil, I must say I find it revolting. That's vanity gone rotten. It's better, though, she should show her hand. It won't do Farwell any harm to see it. He had it coming to him. I didn't mind seeing him squirm last night. It's for Petra I mind."

Cynthia almost agreed with Lewis. But she looked very sorry. After all, Clare Farwell had for several years made life richer and more significant for Cynthia. Cynthia was hungry for the good and the beautiful, as are we all when given leisure to discover ourselves. It was hard giving Clare up as an ideal. Cynthia took a brave hold on honesty and justice when she said, after a painful silence, "Probably you are right, Lewis, in all you say. But I owe Clare a lot. And I'm going to try to stay friends with her and to like her. I mayn't go on idealizing her as I have. I can't any more. I've seen too much, and last night, as you say, finished the revelation. Any one could see that she was vicious toward Petra. But I think her friendship for me is genuine. And I shall try to make mine for her genuine and understanding. I am sorry for her. — And now promise me, Lewis" (he was up, ready to be off. It was quarter to eight), "promise

me at least to suggest that Petra stays home to-day. Couldn't I take her place? I have nothing to do. I'd love it."

"You're a dear," Lewis said. "I'll let you know if I need you. As I said, I'm sure Petra's all right by now. She's a healthy creature. I wish I had your charity, Cynthia. I need it terribly."

Green Doors had a hushed air. Lewis felt, from the manner of Elise who opened the door to him, that the curtain had not yet been rung up, as it were, and that it was a little unreasonable of him to expect to be let in on the stage while the hands were still busy shifting scenery from night to morning. But when he asked for Petra, Elise's face cleared. Petra, since her job, had become a worker, one of the hands. Part of real life. If it was only Petra he wanted, well, Petra could be produced easily enough.

"She hasn't come down to breakfast yet. She ought to have been down half an hour ago. The cook was just asking me, was she coming?"

"She had a headache last night. Perhaps she is not able to get up. Will you please go and see? Tell her that Doctor Pryne is calling and that it's all right, he'll go along without her, unless she's better."

Lewis walked back and forth over a space of twelve of the floor tiles in the great hall while he waited for Elise's return. He counted them each time. They were beautiful tiles. Gray-green and glistening with a silken

sheen. The maid seemed a long time away. But she came at last, presenting to his expectant and quickly questioning look a face of blank perplexity.

"Miss Farwell didn't sleep in her room last night," she said. "Her bed is opened, just as I left it, and her night things laid out. I can't think —"

"Take me to her room. Let me see it." Lewis had the woman by the elbow and was pushing her toward the staircase. It was as if he had taken in Harry's words about Petra's not going to bed but out the front door for the first time. Without a wrap! And Clare had said, "She'll be in bed by now then. It's really October." — Something like that, anyway.

As Elise led the way up the stairs, Lewis knew, absolutely, that he had lived through these very moments before. He knew also that the dénouement was to be a tragic one. He knew beyond this that he and nobody else in the whole world was responsible and to blame. There was nothing dreamlike in all this. It was as if he were more, not less, sensibly conscious than ordinarily.

Lewis had no hesitation whatever about entering the room which the maid whispered to him was Petra's. It was a corner room: two windows on each side. He looked about on perfect order. Glazed chintz draperies thickly pleated, like cardboard, were drawn across the windowpanes, pulled there by the maid who had opened Petra's bed for the night, as a screen for her undressing. Petra

would have pushed them wide and opened the windows if she had slept here, of course. The curtains being drawn, and the windows shut, was evidence that she had not. Lewis turned to the bed. A pleated spread to match the curtains had been carefully removed and laid across two chairs; stiff and unwrinkled. The sheets were turned down. Across the foot of the bed a white nightgown was laid out, and down on the floor a pair of high-heeled mules, gay with pompoms. The dressing table, in one corner, with its rows of silver and glass-topped jars and bottles, was in exquisite order. Everything in the room was orderly — untouched. Even in his condition of fearful presentiment of evil, Lewis looked for the picture he had given Petra yesterday for her birthday. Had she hung it here in her bedroom, as he had hoped she would? No, there was a painting by, Georgia O'Keefe on one wall, — a picture Petra couldn't possibly understand. Nothing else.

Strange to be looking hungrily here for signs of Petra's personality when Petra herself was lost! Strange to care that there was nothing here in Petra's own place, her room, to speak her real! Stranger yet that there was nothing, not a book, not a flower, — not a scrap of living interest anywhere! It might have been a stage bedroom. All the properties necessary for the idea that somebody did use it to sleep in — yes. But you must wait for the actress to come on, to know what she was like. *A stage bedroom!* And yet this was Petra's retreat, her

very own room, her place. Lewis almost shuddered at it. The Maid of the Alder — the hollow woman. It might have been her cave! It was so soulless.

The brilliant October sunlight turned the shut curtains into a glaring purplish pink. The image of a peacock spreading a mammoth spectroscopic tail was embossed on the oyster-colored rug. There were smaller peacocks on the backs of the chairs. Suddenly Lewis stopped looking for signs of Petra. When she came in here, herself, her personality, was shut away, outside the four walls of her bedroom. He felt that it must beat around the walls all night to get in. She slept in a place shut away from herself. This was madness! She wasn't here. Hadn't been here ever. Not really. Where *was* she?

Elise had followed him in. He turned to her and all she saw was an efficient, cool person who would make everything all right. She was beginning to get over her scare. Doctor Pryne was not scared.

"Has Miss Farwell any other room than this? A sitting room?"

"No, sir. There is the bath. I looked in there when I came up. She didn't use her towels last night. I don't think she came into the room at all after I fixed it, sir."

"Miss Farwell wore a white dress last night. Whitish, anyway. See if that is in her closet, please."

Elise hurried to the closet. In spite of the way Doctor Pryne's demands came — like firecrackers crackling — Elise still trusted to his coolness. It kept her cool.

"No, sir. That dress isn't here. It was a new one."

"Does Miss Farwell ever sleep anywhere else than here, when she's at home? At the guest house, for instance? Or in another bedroom?"

"No, sir. We don't keep the beds made up, except when there are guests."

"Have you any ideas at all where Miss Farwell *might* have gone last night? To sleep?"

"No, sir. I thought she came to bed early, sir. I stayed up last night to close up the house. Mrs. Farwell told me then that Miss Farwell had gone to bed early and that we were to be quiet. I mean, sir, we stood just outside Miss Farwell's door, talking in whispers, not to wake Miss Farwell, when Mrs. Farwell said good night to me. Mrs. Farwell thought just as I did that Miss Farwell was here in bed, asleep."

"Would you be able to tell if any of Miss Farwell's clothes were gone? A coat, for instance. It was cold last night. She was dressed in a low-necked, sleeveless dance frock. She couldn't go away anywhere like that."

"Oh, no, sir, she couldn't. I'll see, sir."

Lewis went to the windows, one after another, and yanking the cords that worked the curtains, let in the light. From each cord dangled a heavy silk peacock for tassel. Ugh!

The maid turned from the open sliding doors of the wardrobe which took up one whole side of the room.

"Everything is here, sir. She hasn't so many clothes!

Lovely dresses, but not many. I'd know if anything was gone, I am sure."

"What time did you lock the house up last night? If Miss Farwell had gone out for a walk, say, and came back after you locked it, could she have got in?"

"It was after you had all gone, I locked it. After the party. Around midnight. Miss Farwell hasn't a key. There aren't any. One of the servants bolts the doors and windows the last thing at night and that is the only time they are locked. If Miss Farwell had come to the door and found it locked, though, she had only to ring the bell. Somebody would have heard. Or she could have knocked on her father's window. He has a bedroom right on the terrace."

Although Doctor Pryne's coolness was still consoling her somewhat, Elise's face, during these rapid questions and answers, had gone gradually dead white and her knees were shaking. She presumed at this point to ask a question on her own part: "Oh, sir, do you think anything has happened? There's the river beyond the meadows. . . ."

If looks could kill, the look Elise got from Doctor Lewis Pryne in return for her own one question would have struck her down on the spot. — So she said later, when she told the whole story of what she called the "inquest" to Clare, — told it with tears and to the accompaniment of many careful promptings. She knew from that look that her idea of Miss Farwell as a possible suicide angered the doctor even more than it frightened

herself. So she said hastily, shaking more than ever, but the color a little returning to her blanched cheeks, "Or it might be she's kidnaped. Mrs. Farwell is one of the richest women in the State of Massachusetts. It said so in the *Transcript*. They might know she would give anything to get Miss Farwell back. Do you think it's a kidnaping, sir? Oh, poor Mrs. Farwell! This will break her heart!"

She was weeping openly by then. But she hoped it would be she and no other who told Mrs. Farwell the news. And certainly nobody could get ahead of her in telling it to the other stage-hands at Green Doors. It would be strange if anybody got ahead of her, since she was the very first to learn of the disappearance and the inquest had begun with her, so to speak.

"You say Mr. Farwell sleeps downstairs? Take me to his room. Hurry!"

Again the doctor had her by an elbow, pushing her ahead of him. Again they were on the stairs, only this time he was propelling her downward. But in spite of the steady pressure of the doctor's fingers on her elbow, and his air of a perfect right to command, she found the courage to suggest, "Hadn't we better tell Mrs. Farwell, sir? Mr. Farwell won't like being disturbed at this hour. Mrs. Farwell won't mind. She's a lovely woman."

All the doctor said to that was, "Mr. Farwell's room. Which way?" They were at the foot of the stairs.

But Elise never told Lewis which way, for he had dropped her arm. No, more than that, he actually pushed

her away. Petra was coming toward them through the great hall from the street door. She had left it wide open behind her. The door was a wide, high plaque of golden light; and Petra against it, in her glassy frock, was more like a ghost than a girl — just that first minute.

"What is it? What is the matter, Elise? Why, good morning, Doctor Pryne."

Yes, it was Petra, not ghostly now. Lewis' eyes had adjusted themselves to the morning sunlight flooding the door. It was Petra all right. Reticent. Nice-mannered. Pleasant.

Lewis whirled on the staring maid. "Thanks for all you did," he said. "Go away now." Elise went, but no farther than the dining room; from there she heard most of what passed between the doctor and Miss Farwell and reported it concisely, in spite of excited weeping, to Mrs. Farwell herself a few minutes later.

"You didn't sleep in your room last night, Petra. I was frightened. I am afraid I frightened the maid. Are you all right?"

"Yes. I could see something was the matter with Elise. I am sorry either of you was worried. I meant to get in before anybody noticed. I'm all right, thanks."

There she stood, quite close to him, — real. In her party frock and her fragile high-heeled slippers, immaculate and self-possessed. Even her hair was as shining and groomed as last night, but with a new touch added: a narrow violet band was tied around her head, back of her ears, holding the curls in place. It was that ribbon

with its flat little bow at the side of her head, which infuriated Lewis.

"Where did you sleep last night?"

Elise, listening from the dining-room, where after all it was her place to be ready to serve Miss Farwell her breakfast when she came in for it, was amazed at the harshness of the tone putting the question. Doctor Pryne had been sharp and quick with herself — but not harsh like this. This was downright rude — and to Miss Farwell! But Miss Farwell was equal to him. She was equal to any one. She was every bit as real a lady as was Mrs. Farwell herself, in spite of being so different. Elise knew. She had lived in the house with Miss Farwell for three years now.

Petra said, "Somehow I don't think that you have a right to ask, Doctor Pryne. Not like that exactly."

"I have. I have been in hell. Scared out of my wits. I thought you — I didn't know what had happened to you. You've got to tell me where you were, Petra, — where you slept."

Then Lewis saw that although Petra was very erect in the flooding sunlight, with brushed hair, and coolly half-smiling lips, her face was haggard beyond belief. Austere haggard.

"Petra — !" he urged again — almost gently now — then stopped. "My dear, have you had breakfast?" But she had brushed her hair, tied a ribbon about it in an infinitely enchanting way, — so why not breakfast too? Why did he worry about so trivial a matter in any case!

"Yes. We — I had breakfast. Hours ago." But she looked down, away from Lewis' look, very quickly as she changed the "we" to "I." Now that she was looking down, Lewis could see how, over night, her face had thinned. He could almost see the bones of her cheek through the transparent flesh.

She looked up as if to ward off his discernment. "Doctor Pryne! Could you get along at the office without me to-day? I am — I think I am — well, perhaps too tired."

"No, Petra! I can't go off and leave you. You must come with me. Now. You needn't work. But I'm not going to leave you to Clare. We can talk in the car."

But Petra misunderstood the reason for his insistence. She had suddenly remembered that Janet wouldn't be in the office. The night she had passed had blurred her memory of ordinary things. But now she took hold of ordinary things again, even steadied herself by their cognizance. She was young, strong, and no shirker.

"Oh, of course, I must come. I had forgotten Janet wasn't coming. Truly I had. Will you wait while I change? I saw your car outside. We'll still be in time. It is still early."

Lewis went out to wait in the car. He would not think. There was not one single thing that ordinary conjecture could do for him. Petra must confide in him before he would ever be able to think one straight thought again. In an amazingly short time she came running out, pulling on a polo coat over one of her office dresses. She

waited till she was in the car beside him to put on her felt hat. Petra's hats and coats, Lewis had noticed gradually, as the summer wore on, had nothing of the magic and unique loveliness of her frocks. They were merely concealing and casual. In fact, this same violet-colored felt, with its moderately wide and down-tilting brim, had sufficed her all summer in town, and this polo coat was the only coat he had ever seen her wear.

"I'm sorry that I had to keep you waiting." She said it in her ordinary ingenuous and clear, clipped tones as he started his engine.

That she was not wavering in her good manners, that not so much as her voice was nicked by the night's experience (whatever it had been!), brought all Lewis' anger sweeping back. What was she made of! She might play this game with Clare, years on end, if she liked, — this game of good manners covering a secret, vital, beating heart. But she could not play it with Lewis himself any longer. They were to understand each other now. He felt capable of wrenching Petra's secret from her heart with the strength of his bare hands. Her reticence — it should go down. He would destroy it. Never in his life had he been more exasperated.

Then they came to the one sharp turn in Clare's beloved little country road, and Lewis' violent feelings almost ended in a violent smash; for a stalled roadster was there, taking up the middle of the way. Only by a superhuman pulling of his whole steering gear to one side, then steadying the bounding car among threaten-

ing tree boles and so somehow getting it back to the road, did Lewis avoid calamity. Back, safe in the road, Lewis pressed his accelerator and sped on without a backward glance or even a curse at the driver of the stalled car. Lewis had seen the man well enough in that split second when he jammed on the brakes and turned the wheel. It was Neil McCloud, on his knees, struggling to get a tire either on or off one of the wheels of his gaudy roadster. Neil McCloud, on the almost unused road to Green Doors, not fifteen minutes after Petra had appeared from her mysterious night away from home! If the tire had not punctured, Neil could have been a quarter of the way back to Boston by this time. And he would have been. Certainly he had not meant Lewis and Petra to pass him.

Lewis shut his lips and waited for Petra to speak. If she would only exclaim, "Wasn't that Neil?" Or "Why didn't you stop? That man needed help!" Or she might say, "Whatever is Neil McCloud doing out here so early!" Yes, Petra might say practically any inane thing at this minute, and Lewis, God help him, would have believed it ingenuous. It was her saying nothing that was so blasting. . . .

They had rushed on for almost a full minute's damning silence before Lewis gave up his desperate hope that Petra would say some innocent word and looked at her. Her face under the rakish, slouched felt hat was utterly colorless, but her eyes were *swimmingly bright*. Lewis could see that. And even as he looked,

although she did not turn her face or give the slightest voluntary sign that she was conscious of his regard, her pallor vanished. Fire kindled on her cheeks.

Now Lewis knew why he had been so bitterly angry all these minutes since Petra's safe return, with her hair brushed to glisteningness, and a violet ribbon binding her curls. Intuition had outleapt conjecture. Even before Petra had spoken a word, while she had stood, an angel, against the bright gold plaque of the October sunlight filling the doorway, Lewis had known that he hated her beyond reason, that he loved her beyond reason — more than he had ever loved her before, — and that she was not his.



Chapter Twenty-Two

LEWIS GATHERED THE MORNING'S MAIL OUT OF THE box let into the office door, and passing through the reception room, shut himself into his own office. He had let Petra out at the street entrance and then driven on to find a parking place for his car. She had come up ahead of him and would be in the dressing room now. He put the mail down on his desk and settled himself into his chair.

This was Tuesday, the morning Lewis gave to the clinic. But he must sort his mail first. He could not hear Petra come out of the dressing room and move around in the reception-office, but he was as conscious of all her motions out there beyond his shut door as if she were making them in his heart. He saw her looking down, glancing up, picking up the telephone. She must stop moving about in his consciousness. . . .

He was here, alone, with the day's work before him. Why, he needn't even think about Petra if he didn't want to, still less let her move about, looking up, look-

ing down, picking up the telephone, through the very tissues of his heart.

But what was it Petra had said to McCloud that day of the miracle? Lewis knew it by heart, it was often in his mind; yet now he was groping for it confusedly! He put his head into his hands. Was this it? — "Love is the word. You must say that. Try to say 'I love.'" —

And McCloud had said it — while the shackles of hate and rebellion fell away and left him a free man — free in love. If Lewis' shackles could only fall, as had Neil's! If he could only love Petra and not hate her, then he would be able to bear, perhaps, not having her. And hatred of Petra seemed to make him hate everything else. What was even his work to him now! He was bored by the sight of this pile of letters. He was unnerved, paralyzed. But love does not unnerve and paralyze. It isn't in its nature. Hate does that. Yes, if only he could say, as Neil had said, "I love!"

But how could he say it? How could an ordinary person like himself love as the saints love? Well, Neil was no saint and he had said it. But the Little Flower herself had helped Neil. She wasn't helping Lewis. And why should she? Lord have mercy on him, a sinner!

Lewis lifted his head from his hands. He must get to work, anyway. That meant he must begin to use his mind — stop writhing! That was all his mind had done ever since he had seen that hot blush spread over Petra's face. He and Petra had scarcely spoken to each other on

the twenty-mile drive which had been made in less time than Lewis cared to remember now. What had he thought speed would do for the situation? But here was this bunch of mail. He'd got to concentrate. This was his life, his job, here under his hand. His plain duty.

Lewis tore open an envelope. Inside was a scrawl from Nelson, the brain surgeon, giving the hour set for a certain Eric Larsen's operation. Nine-thirty, this morning. The chances of the man's recovering were slim, Lewis knew, but there was no choice; an operation there must be. Lewis' responsibility had ended, once he had passed the man on to Nelson, of course. But he had promised Eric Larsen to go with him to the operating room and stand by until the affair was over. Lewis had been at the hospital yesterday just before driving out to Meadowbrook; had spent the better part of an hour beside Larsen's bed in the midst of the ward. That Larsen did not once rouse to the point of recognizing him had not made Lewis feel the time wasted. Who was he to say that the man's consciousness—at some incommunicable level—was not aware of his friend at hand, sympathetic and hopeful for him. And when Larsen came out of ether this morning, if he did come out, it would be no strange, chance nurse whom his glance should meet, but the one person who knew all about his failures, his crimes,—and his hopes of regeneration: the only friend he laid claim to, Lewis himself.

But nine-thirty! That meant that Lewis must get along. The rest of this mail must be handed over to—Petra.

"Let me love again! Give me the love to love You with. Not for my sake. For Eric Larsen's sake. He needs me now, this minute, worthless as I am. Give me this love so that I may go on and do this one morning's work that You have given me. Make your gifts whole—the work and the love to do it with.—For this suffering Eric Larsen's sake, not mine, who am unworthy, Lord."

Lewis was looking around for his hat, as he prayed. There it was, knocked onto the floor somehow. The office certainly needed Miss Frazier. He collected the hat and snatched up the remaining bunch of letters. And as he performed these simple, objective acts, the shackles fell. There was no vision, no sensible response from on High. Nothing like that. Nothing in the world—but hatred and anger dissolving from his consciousness with the rapidity of light. "Deo Gratias" was all Lewis breathed in recognition of the Spirit's blowing, and in another instant he was out in the reception office, by Petra's desk.

Petra was talking to McCloud over the telephone. Lewis recognized the vibrations of McCloud's voice, although he caught nothing of the words. Petra, glancing up at her employer, said quickly, interrupting the voice, "The doctor's here, Neil. Waiting to speak to me. Call me up when I get back from lunching with

Dick. Two this afternoon. Good-by," and put the instrument down sharply.

"I'm in a tearing hurry, Petra," Lewis said. "You'll have to go over these letters. Clip all that look personal together. Whether they're marked personal or not. Make notes about the rest on the envelopes. If anything urgent comes up, I'll be at the hospital till noon, anyway, but don't call me for anything there till after eleven. No matter how urgent. I'm watching an operation. I'll be back here by two, and if it's possible, I'll let you go home then. There's aspirin in the right top drawer of my desk. Better take two. If that Philadelphia man shows up or calls, tell him I'll see him at three, with the boy, here. But aside from that, keep the afternoon clear. I don't like your looking so tired. Think you can stick it until two?"

"Oh, yes! I'm perfectly all right. The aspirin will help a lot. Everything will be all right here. Is it Eric Larsen — the operation?"

Petra had a special interest in Eric Larsen, the big shambling Swede, with his shifty eyes and oddly contrasting child-like trust in the goodness and power of Doctor Pryne. But she had been almost afraid of him when he first started coming. She had hidden her nervousness, however, and even Janet had not guessed what an ordeal those first few visits had been. Soon fear had turned to pity. Then had come the afternoon when Eric Larsen had appeared before her desk, roaring drunk and dangerously ugly, just after Doctor Pryne had

gone for the day. Petra, though in a very agony of terror, had stood by Janet when she insisted they must get him quietly back to his lodging house and up to his bedroom safe. Janet said that otherwise he would spend the night in jail and that wouldn't help what Doctor Pryne was doing for him, — now would it! The next day Doctor Pryne had been appalled by their temerity, or tried to seem so; but the truth was, and they both knew it, that he was, in his heart, delighted. — So now, naturally, Petra had a special interest, if this was the day they were operating on Eric Larsen.

"Yes, it's Larsen," Lewis replied. "Nine-thirty. If he pulls through, we'll write all about him to his mother in Upsala. She may send for him to come home. Almost any mother would now, in spite of everything."

Petra tingled with gratification. Why, this was the way Doctor Pryne talked with Janet herself, confiding plans and hopes to her concerning his cases! To cover up her sudden delight she said again, "Everything will be all right here. Don't give anything a thought, Doctor Pryne." — How ready she was to forget his unreasonableness of the early morning, now that he was treating her not only with the respect he gave Janet, but almost with the same intimacy of confidence! Perhaps he hadn't been really angry with her, after all, nor intended to humiliate and wound her. Perhaps it was only because she had been so terribly tired Petra had felt, suddenly, in the hall at Green Doors early this morning, that Doctor Pryne disliked and mistrusted

her. It must have been just her stupid mistake. Even without his being so sweet now, she would have come to realize her stupid mistake, given a little time. For Doctor Pryne would never use the tone she thought he had used to her, even if he had wanted to; he was too innately kind. And his silence all the long drive in had had nothing to do with her, as she in her mean selfish egoism had thought it had! He had been worrying about Eric Larsen. About the operation. Naturally, he wouldn't want to talk! — Now, if only Petra weren't just a little frightened about Teresa, she would be happy indeed! For Doctor Pryne had said, "If he pulls through, we'll write all about him to his mother in Upsala. She may send for him to come home. Almost any mother would now, in spite of everything." *We will write. We. Not I!* She might have been Janet!

The happiness of feeling herself not only reinstated but lifted even higher than ordinary in Doctor Pryne's good will did more for Petra than the two aspirin tablets which she immediately and obediently gulped down. She was hardly tired at all now, in spite of having had no sleep.

Lewis got back to the office before Petra had returned from lunching with Dick. He supposed that date must have been made before last night. He left his door open so that he would hear when Petra came in.

He heard her step at last and called out to her. "I'm back, Petra. Please come in here."

He was surprised that she neither answered nor came, for a long minute. But he felt her there, all that tense, hesitant minute, just beyond the line of his vision. He knew, by some sixth sense, that she was struggling mightily with herself to obey his command. Then she came.

"But what is it? What has happened?" Lewis was up and around the desk the instant he saw her face. "Petra! You frighten me, looking like that!"

"Oh, no, I don't. You're like some kind of god, above everything. Above being frightened."

"You'd better tell me what's happened, though. You've no reason to be angry with me, anyway. What have I done?"

"I'm not angry with you. You haven't done anything. How is Larsen?"

"Larsen's dead. But don't cry. Everything was done that could be. He just had to die, I guess. *Don't cry.*"

"I'm not crying. Or am I? I thought I wasn't!" She was wiping the tears from her face with the back of her wrist. "We'll never write that letter to his mother in Upsala now, will we!"

"It may be better so. I'm afraid she was never much of a mother, you know. What has happened between you and Dick, Petra? Anything you want to tell me? I can see you have had some sort of a shock."

"I have. It's my letter. The one I wrote him. You read it, he said. That simply idiotic letter. I wrote it because I was sorry for Dick. I thought I'd been all

wrong about him and Clare. I thought I'd been cruel to him! I thought I'd insulted him, unforgivably. So I told him why I couldn't — couldn't marry him. And you read it. And I won't work here any more. I couldn't, now. But where can I work? How can I earn money? I want never to see you again."

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, Petra. Why you don't want to work for me, I mean, or see me again. But that's all right. No reason I should know. There are other jobs. We'll find you one. Is that all that makes you — that makes you look like this? I thought something terrible had happened. I really did."

"Something has. Worse than his showing you that letter and your knowing everything about me!" She stopped, took off her hat, dropped it into the patients' chair. That incongruously worn-looking, slouchy felt hat! Her hands went to her hair, pressing it back from her forehead. Then, standing very straight, and with eyes on the window, not Lewis, she said, "Dick says that things are wearing 'pretty thin' between my father and Clare. He says that he and Clare belong to each other 'by right of understanding and sympathy.' He says he worships her and that — that she kissed him. On the road. Last night. When they went out. You remember? He says Clare wants me to know. He says Clare thinks that they owe it to me, to *let* me know. He says Clare is so fond of me that for a long time — for months — she has tried to think that black was white, and white black,

so that she might not lose me as her daughter. He says Clare feels more a traitor to me than to my father. He says Clare feels that I need her more than my father needs her. He says Clare will never, never stop loving me and taking care of me, as long as I will let her. He says he means both financially and spiritually. He says it would simply break Clare's heart if I change in my feelings toward her simply because she has changed in her feelings toward my father. He says Clare trusts me to be objective and detached in this difficult situation. More difficult for Clare than for any of us, but she is being big and brave. He says Clare wants him, Dick, to help me to a sane, large-minded, unselfish point of view. . . . But before he said anything at all, he swore me to secrecy about what he was going to say. They are going to wait to tell Father, you see, until he has finished the last chapter of the novel. It might upset him, hurt the book. Clare thought even of that. But there's even a better reason for secrecy. Clare hasn't actually decided she will marry Dick. Dick says he has still to get her definite promise. Dick says she is terrified that she can't make him absolutely happy. But she can. He will make her see she can. So he swore me to secrecy and then told me all this. And my first conscious act, since, is to tell you every word he said, — the whole business. That's the kind of a girl I am. You see the kind of girl I am. You see. You see. You see. The kind of girl I am. You see! You see! You — "

But Lewis by now had stopped her. He had laid

firm hands on her and put her into his own chair, even in that moment remembering that the patients' chair was occupied by a violet felt hat, — shabby, yes, but since it seemed to be Petra's only hat, probably worth preserving. . . .

"Sit there, Petra. Stop. There's nothing to cry about. Be as mad as you like. But don't cry. Dick must have gone crazy. This is beyond reason. Of course, a woman like Clare will never give up a Lowell Farwell for that callow fool. She never expected him to believe she would. She was merely practicing her art — out on the moonlit road last night. Dick happened to be there to practice on, that was all. The poor boy's stark crazy. And Clare was rather mad herself, last night. She was horribly wounded in the most vulnerable part of her spirit's anatomy."

But Petra was going on again. Her head was in her hands, as his had been in his hands earlier in the day. And she was talking now not to him, but to herself, behind her hands. "They are horrible. All of them. Clare, Father, Dick, Marian. All the people who belong to me. All I belong to. I have known it a long time. But I was weak. I didn't know how to escape. How to get out. Now I shall escape. Now I shall get out. Only how can I earn the money? I won't work here. Not for you. But I must get away from Green Doors."

Lewis heard Petra, faintly, going on with it while he was off getting her a glass of water. He came back,

said, "Drink this. Stop talking. Let me think a minute. We're both too excited."

She stopped talking, but she did not take the water. And she kept her head in her hands. Lewis sat himself on the corner of the desk. He took his cigarette case from his pocket but put it back unopened.

He said, "Petra, I understand. Everything, almost, I think. Yes, you must get away from Green Doors. Live your own life. I thought that, you know, that first day, when I went there to tea. And last night it was even more clear to me. But there's nothing to be so frightened about. You are silly to be scared about the money. You'll make enough. And if you don't want to go on with this job, well, there's no need to. At least, not after Miss Frazier gets back. You must stand by till then, of course. You wouldn't like yourself if you didn't. But after she's back, you can go. I'd already been thinking about it. There are other jobs, you know. And what about Teresa? Can't you live with her? The way you planned — once before?"

Petra had listened, hardly breathing. Now she lifted her ravaged young face and looked at him, hope dawning. "But do you mean it? Am I good enough to recommend? Any one would believe you, of course, if you said I was. But can you really say it? You have to go slow when you dictate to me, you know. And yesterday in that letter I spelt hypophrenia wrong."

"I *used* it wrong, you mean," he said. "It was a silly

word to use. I intended feeble-mindedness and should have said it."

"You are laughing. You are making fun!"

"Not at all. But I'm not crying."

"And you will recommend me? In spite of the spelling and all? But — but eighteen dollars a week won't be enough. If I don't live at Green Doors, if I go right away, I must have more than that. I'm not worth it, I know, but I *must* have it."

"I don't agree with you there. You could manage well enough. But we needn't go into that now. There's loads of time. We'll work the whole thing out together. You and I. When you are quiet and rested. Once we face the whole situation squarely and intelligently, the next steps will come clear. But you must go home now and rest. That's what I called you in for, to tell you I wouldn't need you this afternoon."

"Has Neil called up? I'd better wait for that."

"The telephone hasn't rung since I came in." Lewis took out his cigarette case again and this time lit a cigarette. "Drink that water, Petra," he said. "You know, I thought you were going to have hysterics here a minute ago. Congratulations that you didn't. You had cause enough. But now I want to tell you something. About Neil — . He can't help you disentangle yourself from this Green Doors spider web. Or if he does, it will only be for you and him another web that you'll start spinning together with the same disastrous cruelty to lives. It doesn't matter what you two are to each

other. It doesn't matter what has happened between you. If you want *really* to be free of Green Doors — of what Green Doors stands for in your life — you've got to do it alone. Neil can't help you."

Petra had dropped her head into her hands again, when he assured her that the telephone had not rung since he came in; but he thought she was listening. He went on, anyway, speaking gently and with a kind of brittle clearness. "Neil is married, Petra. Married. Just as long as Edyth Dayton lives, he is married. No matter how devotedly he loves another woman, Edyth will remain, in his deepest consciousness, his wife. . . . Didn't you know that, Petra?"

Lewis had never been farther from thinking of his own interests. For the moment he, Lewis Pryne, existed only to save this girl from calamity. He knew now that his yesterday's intention of asking Petra to be his wife, no matter if she did love Neil, had been mad and wrong. A heart like Petra's — so passionate and whole — must break or be reborn; it could never be patched up and used again, like a broken vase.

"Didn't you know that, Petra," he repeated, when the silence grew too painful. "Didn't you know that Neil will consider himself married, no matter how good a divorce his wife brings home from Switzerland?"

This she did hear and looked up at Lewis. She seemed, strangely, almost herself, he thought, — almost natural now and calm. And she bore it out by saying in her normal, ingenuous, even winged voice, "You are talking

about Neil? But I do know that about him, Doctor Pryne. Of course Neil won't marry as long as Edyth lives. He can't. I understand perfectly. It breaks my heart."

It was rather ironic, perhaps, that those four definite, simple, unenigmatic words spoken in that winged voice were what now finished the business of Lewis' own heart's breaking.

"Yes, of course," he said. "I know it does. But Petra, that isn't the point. The point is not to break Neil's heart, and little children's hearts and — and Teresa's. You must tell everything to Teresa, I think. She, of all people, can help you. . . . But now you must get home and rest. We'll go in my car. No, I forgot. We can't. There's that appointment at three you made with the Philadelphia people. You must go in a taxi then. But look here, Petra. What about Clare? The maid — Elise? — will have told her all about your coming in this morning. That you didn't sleep at Green Doors! You'd better, after all, wait till I'm free. That's something we'll have to fix up. And these people are due now, almost. My dear, I hadn't realized what a mess I may have made for you this morning until this minute. Had you?"

Petra was looking at him with the strangest, faint smile. Her eyes had come blue. They must have been not blue but dark with pain and fear all this time, or now they would not be coming blue like this as he looked into them! There was a little color in her face too.

"You're sweet to care about such little things — concerning me!" she was saying. "But I'd rather go right along on the train now. I'll just make it. I haven't a dollar to spend on a taxi. Clare has already questioned me. She called up the first thing we got in this morning. But it's all right. I told her I slept in the guest house under one of the steamer blankets. I said my room seemed airless and my head ached. She and Father have gone to the Cape, anyway, for over night. That's why she called up instead of waiting till I came home. She won't be there, you see."

Petra put her own construction on the strange gravity that grew in Doctor Pryne's eyes as she made these explanations, and added quickly, "Yes, I know. A lie. But I have had to lie to Clare. She lies to me with action. If I was to live with her at all, I had to protect myself, hadn't I! But now it will end. After I am away from her, I hope I shall never tell another lie as long as I live. I am going to try terribly hard. It is Neil who has made me ashamed of my lies. Teresa never knew about them, of course. That's why Neil stopped coming to Green Doors with me. He wouldn't lie, and simply hated having me."

Lewis was suddenly aware of sounds out in the reception room. Somebody coughed — to get his attention, he imagined. It would be the Philadelphia people, with their son. He said in a low voice to Petra, and hurriedly, "Go wash your face now, while I call the taxi. We'll charge the mileage to office expenses, so don't

fuss." And when Petra — her face innocent of tear stains and well powdered — returned from the dressing room through Miss Frazier's door, Lewis was tipping two small white pills from the palm of his hand into an envelope. He put the envelope, carefully sealed, into the pocket of Petra's polo coat, and said, "Take two when you get to Green Doors. They're a sedative. Then go to bed. Really to bed. Make them give you dinner on a tray. It won't matter, since Clare and your father are away. — *Would* they have gone to the Cape, do you think, on this jaunt, if Dick had things straight? Of course they wouldn't. Put that out of your head. — By eight or so you'll be rested. Then we can talk. Get dressed and I'll be out as near nine as I can manage. Perhaps we can go over to the guest-house piazza? Like the first time, remember? We'll talk out the whole thing, — about Neil, I mean now. And after all, you mustn't tell Teresa. You'd better tell me. It will be easier — and save Teresa from being hurt. *We'll protect Teresa*. You want to, don't you?"

Then, because the bewildered look she gave him stabbed him almost beyond endurance, he whispered — for the door all this while was open into the reception room — "My dearest, everything will be all right. In the end. Why, the whole world is waiting spread out for you, lovely long years of your life. Things pass. Even loneliness passes. Truly. I have — been lonely — and I know."

Down at the curb the taxi driver opened the taxi door when he saw them emerge from the foyer of the office building. But Lewis stopped short, midway across the pavement. There was something more he must say, even if those people were waiting for him up there in his office, the pale mother holding the writhing idiot boy desperately in tired arms.

"Petra," Lewis exclaimed, "we're in this together, you and I. You can trust my devotion as you'd trust a brother's. If you had a brother, I mean, who loved you very deeply! I'm going to help you get clear of the spider web of Green Doors — and you can talk to me about Neil all you want. You can tell me anything. You see, my dear, I'm fond of Neil too. There's nothing I won't understand when you tell it."

Petra took Lewis' hand, lifted it, and pressed her mouth on its back. A warm, quick kiss. There in the middle of the sidewalk on Marlborough Street in the midst of the foot traffic! Then she ran, before Lewis could follow her, and stumbled blindly into the taxi. The driver stayed waiting a second to see whether Doctor Pryne was coming with the young lady all the way to Meadowbrook, decided he wasn't — Lewis gave him no sign one way or the other — and shut the door. As the cab drove off, Petra kept her face turned away so that Lewis could not see it.



Chapter Twenty-Three

AS LEWIS REENTERED THE RECEPTION OFFICE, PETRA'S telephone was ringing. It was Neil, calling Petra as he had promised, but one hour late. He was surprised that it was Lewis who answered, but said hastily, "I'm grateful it is you, Doctor. I'm calling from Meadowbrook. Is there any chance, if I drive right in now, you could see me? It's something pretty important, Doctor!"

"About yourself? — Or Petra?" If McCloud had been there in the room, instead of merely on the wire, he would have been shocked by the expression on the face of the man of whom he was so confidently asking a favor. The accustomed light was quite gone from Lewis' features. He was gray and stern and looked ten years older.

"It concerns us both. Equally, I guess," was Neil's reply after an instant's hesitation. "But I wouldn't ask for your time like this if it weren't pretty important, Doctor."

"Well, if you start now, I'll be free about the time you get here. But make it snappy, for I've half a dozen professional calls slated between now and dinner."

"Thanks awfully. Will you tell Petra I'm coming? I'd rather not talk to her now. Tell her everything's all right; I'll explain everything when I get there and she mustn't worry."

To this casual request Lewis made a sound that McCloud accepted as both promise and good-by — and hung up. He had not even asked was Petra there. But Meadowbrook? McCloud must be calling from Green Doors itself. Had he been there all day? Had it been more than a sick tire that ailed his car? Well, Lewis did not care about the details — just so long as Petra and Neil did not see each other again until Lewis himself could talk with Petra on the edge of the meadow to-night.

He went through into his own office where the tragic trio awaited him. He took the boy from the mother's arms. The poor little creature came quietly, without the struggle the parents obviously expected, and from that moment, so kind are the ways of God with mortals when they have learned to pray, Lewis' expectation of Neil's near visit and even his anguish for and over Petra were dropped from his consciousness until the work in hand was over — until, in fact, he escorted the parents, himself still holding the boy, out to the elevator, and saw Neil sitting in the reception office in a patient attitude that bore the stamp of having lasted some time.

"Hello," Lewis remarked, coming back. "The coast is clear now."

Neil followed him into his office and took the pa-

tients' chair. But memory assailed him in the act and he went a little pale. The feeling passed quickly, however. That page had been turned forever, he knew well. His cure was permanent. Heaven would not take back its boon.

"Where's Petra?" he asked. "I suppose you packed her off to Meadowbrook early. I'm glad."

"Yes, I did exactly that. You didn't pass her on the road?"

"No, but I wasn't expecting to, you see. I drove like blazes. But I'm going right back. Pretty plucky of Petra, don't you think, to come right along to work this morning! I couldn't. I couldn't have gone to work this morning if not going would bring the end of the world."

"Well, Petra's not working on commission. We have to keep hours here," Lewis remarked shortly. "You're your own boss. That's different."

Lewis could not interpret the odd, quick look Neil gave him then. But that did not matter. What right had the man to sit there so victorious and exalted, speaking of Petra! Petra's face had grown thin over night. There had been no exaltation and glow on its pallor this day. But Lewis was aware that Neil's exaltation — if that was the word for the light in his face — was of a grave variety. Not blatant. It was refined of all dross, to the most casual eye. Gorgeousness had given place to something deeper, richer. . . . Lewis felt his own expression of countenance to be evil. It was as if he could feel a thin mask forming over his face, — particularly ugly

around his mouth and eyes. He looked at Miss Frazier's door knob. He dared not look at McCloud any more. But hate had not returned. Only the awful fear that it might return was stiffening his lips, — his eyelids. For if it did return, here while he faced McCloud, it would be hate of the killing sort. He would hurl himself at the man physically, destroy him if he could — or be destroyed. . . . He had better smoke. They had better both smoke.

Neil refused the cigarette. Well, the gods on Olympus didn't smoke little white cigarettes. But Lewis had no nectar to proffer this young giant, face and body aglow with some sweet, secret victory, eyes sea-blue and steady, long-limbed, free-postured, at ease in the patients' chair. What right had such a being to usurp the place where misery came, year in year out? *Why in God's name was Neil here?*

"Has Petra told you anything about last night?" Neil asked. "I guess she hasn't, or you wouldn't have spoken about her having to keep hours as you did just now."

Lewis shook his head. Then he trusted his voice. "No. I know nothing. Except that the child ran away from her birthday party last night, — said she was going to bed with a headache but ran out the front door instead, without a wrap, and got back at eight this morning, still in her party dress and fagged almost to the danger point. But she's going to tell me. She wants to, I think. I am going out there to-night. Petra has let me assume a responsibility to her. And I might as well tell

you, McCloud, that she is as precious to me — and her welfare as precious — as if she were my own flesh and blood. You'd better understand that. Now what are you here for?"

"That's wonderful!" was the man's surprising answer. "But I rather felt that all along, you know. What I can't understand is Petra's not feeling it, not trusting you before. But this is a grand time for her to begin. She may never need you again so much as she needs you right now, Doctor. She's going to need steadying — and a lot of loving. I'm frightened for her, myself. She's such a kid, really, in spite of the way she swells around with her *three* jobs and keeps a stiff upper lip. You'd think she was made of iron! But she isn't. She's really just a tender-hearted, frightened kid. Teresa, you see, is mother, brother, sister, parents to her, as well as friend. Teresa is home to Petra. All the home she's ever known. Sanctuary too. If — if anything happens — to — to Teresa — I shouldn't wonder if Petra goes right off her head."

Where was the exaltation now? This was just a boy, fighting back sobs.

Lewis got up. He went to the window and sat on the sill, staring at McCloud. But McCloud got control of himself quickly — and with it the exalted look returned. His eyes were blue fire and so terribly steady.

Lewis said, "Neil, I don't know a thing. Petra has been secret with me. From the beginning — or almost from the beginning. I thought you and she were to-

gether last night. I've got it all wrong. What was it really? Something to do with Teresa Kerr?"

Neil got up then. He came and sat on Lewis' desk, his feet in Lewis' chair. He hadn't taken in what Lewis meant about himself and Petra — at least not its implication. It simply passed him by.

"We *were* together," he said. "I was there. Teresa was terribly ill. It must have been about ten o'clock when it started. Janet got the doctor and Father Morris on the telephone. But I'm worried about that doctor. I don't like him or trust him much. Clark's his name. He has a general practice in Meadowbrook. He knows all about you, of course, but says you won't know him. I told him I was coming to ask you to see Teresa and advise us. *He* says Teresa's got to go right off to a sanitarium. There's one in New Mexico that he says is her only chance. He says she ought to start to-morrow. But I don't take any stock in him. Neither does Janet Frazier. She says you are the one who will know what we ought to do. Janet is sure —"

But Lewis interrupted: "Neil McCloud! Start over, will you. I can't seem to catch on to what all this is about. You were at Teresa Kerr's last night? How does Miss Frazier come into it? Where does Teresa live?"

"It's a little house between Meadowbrook and Green Doors. Off the road. You've never seen it, probably. Nobody does. It's right off the road — in another world. The girls call it Mary's Field. Teresa's got a touch of consumption. That's why she's there this summer. So

that she can live practically out of doors. On the porch. She was there, in the long chair, last night. Janet and I had got supper together. Janet's spending her vacation there. We were talking, very gay. It was moonlight. Janet has a mandolin. She's good on it, too. Finally, quite late, Janet went in to do the dishes. She wouldn't let me come. So I stayed out with Teresa. I was going in a few minutes, anyway. Getting back to Boston. I was sitting there on the floor by Teresa's chair. She was lying in the long chair — almost flat. That's what she's had to do lately — whenever she's not sewing. She's so terribly tired all the time! We weren't talking any more. I thought she'd better rest. I was trying to make myself go home. Suddenly she sat up straight with a queer sound in her throat. I jumped up. She put out her hands. Blood came from her mouth. It was only moonlight but I knew it was blood. I thought — we both thought — she was dying. We said things we'd never have said if we hadn't thought so. But that's all right. God intended it, I guess. I called Janet. She got Doctor Clark on the telephone — and then Father Morris. Father Morris is pastor of St. Joseph's in Meadowbrook. It's been Teresa's church all summer. Father Morris seemed to know more than the doctor what to do for Teresa. The doctor just stood around and scolded us about Teresa's having worked so hard on Petra's birthday dress. A good thing Petra wasn't there then! It was Father Morris who told us Teresa wasn't dying. He and Petra, when Petra came, had the coolest heads of us all. They managed

everything. Petra and I stayed with Teresa on the porch all night. She couldn't sleep and Father Morris advised against any drug. We just stayed there quiet. Close to her. At dawn she went to sleep and Janet made us eat breakfast. I took Petra back to Green Doors. We thought Teresa was all right then, you see. But early this afternoon, Doctor Pryne, she had another hemorrhage. That's why I didn't call Petra as I promised to. I didn't want her to know until she got to Mary's Field this afternoon and could see how really better Teresa seems, in spite of this second hemorrhage. She's seemed so well all day — even strong! She even wanted to sit up, but we haven't let her. Father Morris came to the house just before I did call you and said I'd better not wait for Petra's consent to our asking you to see Teresa. He urged me to drive right in and bring you both out. He says Teresa is very seriously ill, now, in spite of her feeling so well, and he feels that we must do something as quickly as possible. He knows about you and your work and was sure you'd come for Petra's sake. You will, won't you?" Neil had told it all quickly, his eyes never leaving Lewis'.

"Of course, Neil. You don't need to ask! But tell me more. Is this why money is so important to Petra? Had she been supporting Teresa with the allowance I was the cause of her losing? Of course. How blind I've been!"

"Teresa makes Petra's clothes and Petra pays her for that. Teresa's got the devil's own pride. She insists on

earning her money, even when she can't hold up her head. So you can't say Petra's been exactly supporting Teresa. She went to Radcliffe, you know, on a scholarship and evenings making Petra's clothes. The idea was that when Teresa got her degree and a job — perhaps one like Janet's — Petra would kiss Clare good-by and live with Teresa and go to some business college herself. They had it all worked out. Teresa was so quick and worked so hard, she hoped to graduate in less than four years. Petra's 'job' at Green Doors was to be merely temporary. That is how she has been able to stand it. But last spring, when everything was working out beautifully, the college doctor found that Teresa had T.B. and they wouldn't let her take her exams. They said she must live in the country, out of doors, all this summer. Petra found the house. She furnished it — borrowed ahead on her allowance. The place belongs to a farmer named Murray and it's always been called 'Murray's Field.' But Teresa understood it 'Mary's Field' and took it without seeing it on account of the name! It's been easy to keep Teresa's living there secret from Green Doors — it's so out of the way. But that's where Petra has been wrong. Teresa would think so too, if she knew. It's like living a double life. All Petra's excuses for being away from Green Doors, you know! Teresa has never guessed how Petra's had to twist and turn. She'd never have let her! Teresa's like truth itself. But sometimes I have to laugh when I picture how astonished Clare would be if she could see Petra Saturday afternoons, on her

hands and knees, scrubbing the kitchen floor at Mary's Field — until I came along, that is. I do the kitchen floor now on Saturdays! — Both the girls are death on dirt. But lately Teresa hasn't been able even to wash the dishes and Petra's done all the cleaning ever since they took the house. — What's the matter, Pryne?"

"Why didn't you trust me? Why did you all leave me out so long?"

"We did trust you. We do. Absolutely. Janet and I, at least. But Petra's been so afraid all the time! Afraid you wouldn't keep it from Clare. She says you belong to Green Doors — not Mary's Field. Petra's a grand kid but she's stubborn."

"Well — let's get going."

"To Mary's Field?"

"Where else? Petra's bound to be there, I should think. And I'd better see Teresa for myself before taking a specialist to her. You shut the windows, Neil, while I just write up this card for the files. I'll have to cut out the calls I was making, for Father Morris may be right, that quick action is needed. Meadowbrook may not be the place for Teresa to stay, — but I hardly think we'll send her so far as New Mexico —"

All the while Lewis talked, he was outlining his recent interview with the idiot boy's parents in illegible characters on a fresh white card. His heart was shaken to its depths but his head and hand were steady.



Chapter Twenty-Four

"IT'S THE NEXT TURN TO THE RIGHT NOW. GO SLOW OR you'll miss it. It looks like a cart road — a wood road. . . . Here 'tis. Yes, it's all right. My car's gone over it hundreds of times."

It was the roughest sort of track, cut through a beech wood, up a hill. They had driven out in Lewis' car, leaving Neil's parked in Marlboro Street. A quarter of a mile of rough going, a turn, and suddenly Lewis saw the farmhouse through lacings of bare branches straight ahead. It was set halfway up a sloping meadow with an orchard at its back. The little old clapboarded dwelling was the color of the branches through which Lewis was seeing it, silver-gray-black-violet. In some lights, particularly after summer rains, the clapboards would be opal.

Neil suggested that they leave the car at the bottom of the meadow and walk up. "Teresa may be sleeping. She won't be expecting to hear a car at this time of day, anyway, and it might startle her. The milkman brings the groceries along with his milk once a day and

that's the only car except mine that ever comes. We didn't tell her I was bringing you. We didn't know you could get away. We thought we'd wait to explain — "

The doorstep, a flat stone, had beguiled the doorsill to follow its own smooth sunken curve. The door stood open into a passage which appeared nothing but transition to clearer, finer country, for it was open at its farther end onto long rows of crooked old bare apple trees twisted by many years of bearing into mysterious contours of beauty. And through the orchard one saw the rounded, mellow slope of the hilltop, outlining a horizon.

There is an orchard, old and rare, —
I cannot tell you where, —
With green doors opening to the sun.

Green doors! This was the green doors that Clare had hoped to hymn — and missed the note. "*I cannot tell you where!*" Cannot because there is no telling it. In this moment of remembering the lines which had given Clare her inspiration for Green Doors, and which she often quoted, Lewis' antipathy for Clare was transmuted into unalloyed pity. Clare wanted the beautiful and good in her life. Sincerely wanted it. But she thought it was necessary to spin it out of herself somehow, — industriously, cleverly spin, spin, spin. It never occurred to her to search for the Beautiful Good, or to love It for Itself in Its objective reality. She was too busy, all times, manufacturing its semblance out of fancy.

Yes. As Lewis stepped over the sill into the little old passage to the crooked, beautiful orchard, a kaleidoscope shift took place in his sympathy. And at the same moment the experience of the early morning was upon him again; *he had been through all this before. He knew this passage, that orchard, by heart.* He knew, too, that grief (he had been wrong in this much of the morning's prevision: it was grief but never tragedy) was waiting him here at the real Green Doors.

Miss Frazier came through a door halfway down the passage and met them. She said in a lowered voice, "You've come! Everything will be all right now. I knew you'd come. Go into the living room, please, and I'll explain to Teresa. Or Neil, you come with me. You will be better than I. We haven't told her Neil was bringing you, you see, Doctor."

"Where's Petra?" Lewis asked quickly.

"She took a rug and her coat and went up into the orchard to sleep. She took your sedative first. But she wants to know when you come. I promised. She wouldn't have rested unless. She doesn't know about the second hemorrhage, or what Father Morris has said. She thinks Teresa is better."

Lewis went into the living room. And even before his eyes began assembling details, he knew, with a start, that everything was here that he had looked to find this morning in Petra's bedroom at Green Doors. This was her environment, her sanctuary, her own place in the sun. He felt Petra's heart beating in this little room,

no matter if they said she was up in the orchard, sleeping. The wide old boards of the floor slanted and dipped as the doorsill had slanted and dipped — fluid — one with the flow of life and time. And there, across the room, between two low-silled windows was the birthday present, his own Fra Angelico picture — perfectly hung. So Petra had brought it here, not to Green Doors. But of course. And under the Fra Angelico there were flowers growing in a dish. Fringed, blue gentians. A big, living clump of them. Planted in dark earth. It is impossible to gather them without the roots, Lewis knew, hence the replanting. On the table, beside the gentians, lay a book, open and face down.

Lewis, with an instinct to save any book, no matter what it was, from abuse, crossed the floor; he would find a marker and close the volume kindly. But when he had it in his hand, it defended its owner with dumb sweetness. It was a Modern Library publication, made for easy usage; the only value it set on itself the value of its word, — spirit not flesh. Lewis glanced at the title: "Marius the Epicurean." Memory stirred. This was the book — wasn't it? — Petra had claimed to have been reading when she did not come to play tennis with Clare that day Lewis first went to Green Doors! The identical volume. He was sure of it. So Clare had been wrong — as, poor creature, she was ever in peril of being: Petra had been reading "Marius" that afternoon. She had been lying out there in the orchard, near the horizon, side by side with Teresa. They had lain sup-

ported by their elbows, turn and turn about, reading "Marius" together. Lewis knew all about that afternoon now, as well as if he had been here himself, in the golden orchard with green doors opening to the sun, sharing "Marius" with them!

And he was glad to know! Then, that June Saturday, he had told himself it was nothing if Petra wanted to impress Clare with reading she had never done. It didn't matter. It was a trivial schoolgirl variety of deception. But now he knew that it had mattered. He had cared more than a little, deep down in his heart. It had left a mark, a tiny wound, but still tender enough to feel the healing in this moment of discovery.

A paper fluttered from "Marius," held open and face down in Lewis' hand. He rescued it from the floor and stood staring. It was his own picture, cut from the roto-gravure section of the *New York Times*, — a photograph of the head that young Italian artist, Ponini, had made when Lewis was in New York last spring, testifying in the Spalding murder case. Ponini had been one of the State's witnesses. He had introduced himself to Lewis outside the courtroom and persuaded him to sit for him a few times during that tedious week of the trial. Ponini had won surprising acclaim for this particular work, and photographs of the head had been published endlessly, till Lewis was sick of opening magazine or paper and seeing it. But Petra! She had chanced on it, cut it out and preserved it. She must have done this before that Saturday when they met again at Green Doors. This

was Petra's writing, in the narrow white margin. She had written "Marius."

But this was carrying things beyond strangeness — into truth itself, which cannot be strange or startling! Years ago, in college, Lewis had identified himself with Marius. A peculiarly poignant identification it had been. — Marius, born on the fringes of Christianity but never amalgamated into it. Always wistful, speculative, skeptical. Infinitely skeptical — but passionately searching. Drawn poignantly toward Christians whenever they came into his life. Loving them beyond others with a sure, contented love. Dying finally to save one of them from death. Ministered to in the act of dying by Christians who took it for granted that the martyr to friendship was one of themselves. Marius hungering for Christianity but never attaining communion with it until the instant of his death — and then attaining it by affinity and accident rather than conviction! But how had Petra seen Lewis in all this? How had Petra known!

Lewis replaced the marker in the book, and the book face down, open at the place he had found it, beside the gentians. Thin October late afternoon sunlight slanted through the little, low-ceiled room, casting a transparency over the white, old paneled walls and the wine-colored floorboards. It was a blest light. There was a blessing on this place. And the blessing, for Lewis, suddenly seemed flowing in one direction and coming to form and color in the clump of blue gentians under the Fra Angelico.



Chapter Twenty-Five

TERESA'S BED WAS ON THE PORCH OFF THE DINING ROOM. Miss Frazier took Lewis as far as the door and left him to go out alone. But Neil was there, sitting on the foot of Teresa's bed. There was room for no more than Teresa's narrow cot, her long chair, a table and one other little wicker chair. Yet Lewis, who had a penchant for spaciousness, had no sense of crowding here. On the contrary, he felt that coming onto Teresa's little porch was like coming out onto deck at sea. The disused farmlands rolled wavelike away on every side, with no glimpse of dwelling or human being anywhere; all was soft, long sweep of meadow and field, climbing waves of woodland, and over all the flowing sky. Teresa's cot stood against the outer edge of the porch, protected above by deep eaves. Over its head, a dark crucifix, tarnished silver, and about a foot high, was nailed against a supporting post.

Not a breath of change seemed to have passed over Teresa since that October day four years ago, when she had opened the door for Lewis in the Farwells' Cam-

bridge apartment. She was fresh and vivid, with smiles rippling to light in brown-gold eyes, and an unselfish, lovely mouth, molded by gaiety and humor. And her voice, exactly as Lewis had remembered it through the years, bore out the smile in her eyes. Yes, Teresa was still all of one piece — spirit and body one. Lewis saw an almost palpable bloom upon her — not the bloom of health, since she was emaciated and flushed with fever — but a bloom, all the same, of freshness and well-being.

Neil pushed the wicker chair a few inches nearer the side of the bed for Lewis' benefit. Lewis, taking the chair, was moved by the effect the dark crucifix, bathed in afternoon light from New England earth and sky, produced on his mood. For, out of doors like this, superimposed against New England fields and sky, the crucifix threw new proportions, as it were, athwart Lewis' concepts. It produced space for infinities and eternities of joyful well-being. Without analyzing it — indeed scarcely noting it — Lewis accepted the shifting of proportions, the touch of sweetness his passing glance at the cross had brought, with simple gratitude: an unuttered thank-you to the Savior.

Neil was saying, "I'll be within call, Doctor, if you want anything." As Neil spoke, he came around past Lewis' shoulder and adjusted Teresa's pillow, his arm for an instant back of it, under her shoulders. "Isn't that better? Is it all right, Teresa?"

The look that passed between the boy and the girl then was one that Lewis charged his heart to remember.

It was love, of course. And love between a man and a woman. Complete recognition of all that such love implies. Yet, although this recognition was no new thing with them, they had kissed each other only when both thought Teresa was dying, and in farewell. And beyond this, not even in farewell — since they were forewarned, having “fallen” once — their lips would never touch again this side of Paradise. Lewis knew. If Neil had not confided in him on the drive here, by silences and broken words, Lewis would still have seen the definiteness of their renunciation in the light of the smiling glance that had passed between them as Neil adjusted the pillow, and known that their love held no flaw of possible betrayal in it. These two were at peace with their Faith and everything of both agony and joy that it entailed for them. But this was not renunciation as religionless moralists think of it. It was simplicity, the simplicity of spiritual health.

When Neil had gone, leaving Lewis and the sick girl alone, Lewis was suddenly shy of Teresa. It was she who should measure his health, not he hers. For it is not the whole but the sick who need a physician. Yet he took Teresa’s wrist, lying there on her counterpane, and started counting her pulse.

Then Teresa laughed — putting him off, making him lose the count. “I thought you never made an examination without Janet to take down notes,” she protested. “She’s here, quite handy. Sha’n’t we call her?”

“No, thanks. This is an exception. I’ll remember well

enough.” And indeed he would. Every word that Teresa gave him, as he asked it, of family history, the course of the development of her disease and the treatment it had had, was etched on his mind for all of life, he felt. He needed no filing card for Teresa. But neither had he needed her answers to his short, quick questions. When he came to it, the examination he gave her lungs told him that she was doomed.

After that examination he sat back, trying to smile at Teresa, trying to be natural. Wasn’t there something simple and of ordinary day that he could say? But he was shy of this girl as he had never been shy of any one in all this mortal world before. Shy but not ill at ease. It was good to be here, he felt. Simply that.

Teresa was smiling into his attempted smile. “Are you really all done?” she asked.

“I think so. The specialists will be more thorough, of course. But I know what to do now, what man we want for you.”

“But you will tell me what you think yourself, Doctor? How ill I am?” She put her hand under her pillow as she asked the brave question and kept it there. Lewis knew that she had found her rosary and was holding it. “They say — Neil and Doctor Clark — even Petra — that I must go away to a sanitarium somewhere. Leave Mary’s Field. But that won’t happen, will it? I can stay here. I needn’t leave Mary’s Field. Is that what you think?”

Lewis had no lies for Teresa. He would not lie to

her by so much as a glance. She was fit for the truth. Perfectly fit. Had he ever been face to face with any one else so stripped, fit and ready for truth!

"There won't be any question about that now. I'm sure of so much," Lewis said. "We'll keep you right here at Mary's Field. And Petra will stay with you all the time. Move her things here. Make it her home. And Neil will be near."

She was smiling. Her hand stayed under her pillow. But tears came to her eyes. Only two escaped, though: one down either cheek. She ignored them but Lewis wiped them away with his own handkerchief. "My blessed child," he said. "You wanted to know. It is right that you should, I think."

"Of course," she answered. "And I knew that you would tell me. I am — very satisfied. It will be nice, not leaving Mary's Field. Having Petra here all the time. Having Neil near. Will you tell them how things are with me? You won't leave it for me to tell them?"

"Yes. Soon, I'll tell them. But not to-night, I think. They aren't like you, Teresa. It will go harder with them. They will need time — and your prayers. You must pray that they may be brave. Neil suspects already, I can tell you. But he still hopes. Petra has only a bewildered, vague fear. So, Neil says, anyway. They needn't be told yet."

"But when the time comes, it will be you — not Neil, nor Janet — nobody else but you, Doctor Pryne, — who

tells Petra? Unless it's me. I may want to be the one to tell her in the end. But otherwise you? And you'll take care of her?"

"Why do you say this? Petra is the dearest thing in life to me, Teresa. But I don't know that that will help her. She doesn't let me very close to her. Neil or Janet might be better."

"Please tell her now, this afternoon, that she's the dearest thing in life to you. She doesn't dream it. She's so silly and humble. She's sweet. She told me, just a little while ago, before she took your pills like a good child and went away to sleep in the meadow, that Dick had showed you that letter she wrote to him at Mount Desert. She's simply dying with humiliation over it. You see, it was you, Doctor, she meant in the letter, and she has no other thought but that you know it was. That you might guess wrong hasn't even occurred to her. You *did* guess wrong, didn't you?"

Lewis pushed back his chair. Got up. "Teresa, bless you. I wouldn't believe any one but you — hardly Petra herself. It's almost impossible to believe. But somehow — I can — I do believe that you know what you are saying."

"You're like Petra, I think. Humble and silly. But sweet."

Neil, who for the last ten minutes or so had been pacing back and forth in the meadow, out of earshot and where Lewis did not see him, had started for the

porch the minute Lewis moved back his chair. "All done?" he asked, coming up onto the porch and looking at Lewis for one swift, keen instant. Lewis nodded. "Yes and I want to see Petra. Is she still sleeping?"

"Oh, no. Janet kept her promise and woke her when you came. She's in the kitchen, starting the supper. She and Janet — Teresa too — want you to stay for supper with us. Petra's getting it started early on purpose, so you will. Janet's gone across lots for an extra quart of milk just on the chance. You won't disappoint us, Doctor?"

"First let me use the telephone. If McKinstry can come out this evening, I'll want to wait and see him. That will make supping here very convenient. Don't talk to this girl too much now. She should rest, Neil."

Neil laughed. "I won't talk at all then. One doesn't, much, with Teresa. She's the conversationalist of our Mary's Field crowd. Have you told her to keep quiet, not talk?"

Lewis shook his head, smiling down into Teresa's eyes. "No," he said. "I haven't told her anything. Given no orders. Teresa is wiser than all of us put together. She's her own best physician."

But in the end, Lewis merely stood thoughtful by the telephone in the passage for an instant, and turned away, toward the kitchen. McKinstry, immediately Lewis asked it, if he could be reached at all by telephone to-day, would be at Lewis' disposal; and if he were out of town or not on the telephone, there would be some one else

available who was good, too. But there was no hurry. Getting a trained nurse out to Mary's Field was of far more immediate importance than getting a specialist. Miss Frazier would help Lewis with that, when she returned with the milk. Lewis himself couldn't remember the name of that woman who had taken such excellent care of the little Nolan girl last month. But Miss Frazier, Janet, would remember. She would remember, too, how one could reach her. The woman should come to-night, of course. Sleep here. Or failing her, some one else whom Janet would recommend. He could wait for Janet for all that.

Lewis went on down the passage to the kitchen door. It was the kitchen, supposedly, since Neil had said that Petra was here, and here she was; but for Lewis it was no special place at all. It was merely Petra. He had come to where Petra was, at last. Come up with her. He felt as if he had been running a long time through dark eternities to this overtaking of his beloved. Between Petra and himself there now only remained a little space of thin, late afternoon light. Blessed light! He saw her through it as through thin glass — a pace away.

She was standing close up against an open window. Her back to it. She was looking at Lewis through the glass-thin radiant atmosphere. Then Lewis heard Teresa say, "Janet was careful not to disturb the chessmen, Neil. The board's on the dining-room table. Shall we finish the game?"

Neil said, "Sure, in a minute. Let me have a cigarette first, though, and just stay by you. You lie quiet. Shut your eyes, dear."

Petra was facing Lewis, yes; but she was not seeing him. She was stone blind with tears. She had been here in the open window all the time. The porch came within a few feet of it. It must, since those voices — Neil's and Teresa's — sounded almost as if they were in the very room. And yet, they were speaking softly. Every bit as softly as Lewis and Teresa had been speaking. Petra had heard every word Lewis and Teresa had said, then. She knew — she knew — why, the child knew that Teresa was going to die. That was as far as Lewis' thought went. Brutally, like that, merely overhearing, she had learned it. With no warning. Alone, here in the kitchen, — with supper to get.

Lewis could not move. Could not speak. He thought his heart would break for Petra. But though she was stone blind, she had heard him come into the passage, hesitate by the telephone, and then his every step to the kitchen door. And now she whispered, "Are you there?"

At that he took the last pace — in a stride. The long race was over. She was no longer a flying, mysterious shadow. Petra was flesh and blood within his arms. But their first kiss had a taste he had not dreamed for it. It was salt with both their tears.

As they drew apart, but not their hands — palm

against palm they still held each other securely — Neil's laugh was ringing in their ears. Quite heartily Neil was laughing, out there on the porch, sitting on the foot of Teresa's cot, at something she just had said.

THE END